

Lectures on

Philippians  
and  
Colossians  
by William Kelly

Published and Distributed

by

THE RALPH E. WELCH FOUNDATION

181 Monterey Road  
Orange, California

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## **GOD THE FOUNTAIN**

O blessed God! how kind  
Are all Thy ways to me—  
Whose dark, benighted mind  
Was enmity with Thee.  
Yet now, subdued by sovereign grace,  
My spirit longs for Thine embrace.

How precious are Thy thoughts  
That o'er my spirit roll!  
They swell beyond my faults,  
And captivate my soul.  
How great their sum, how high they rise,  
Can ne'er be known beneath the skies.

Preserved by Jesus, when  
My feet made haste to hell!  
And there should I have gone,  
But Thou dost all things well.  
Thy love was great, Thy mercy free,  
Which from the pit delivered me.

Before Thy hands had made  
The sun to rule the day,  
Or earth's foundation laid,  
Or fashioned Adam's clay—  
What thoughts of peace and mercy flowed  
In Thy great heart of love, O God!

A monument of grace,  
A sinner saved by blood,  
The streams of love I trace,  
Up to the fountain, God;  
And in His sovereign counsels see  
Eternal thoughts of love to me.

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Lectures on

# Philippians

by William Kelly

## THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

W. K. Translation

I (1) Paul and Timothy, bondmen of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi with bishops and deacons. (2) Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) I thank my God upon my whole remembrance of you, (4) always in my every supplication for you all making the supplication with joy (5) for your fellowship with the gospel from the first day until now, (6) being confident of this very thing, that he who began in you a good work will complete [it] until [the] day of Jesus Christ; (7) even as it is righteous for me to think this of you all, because ye have me in your heart; and both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye are all fellow-partakers of my grace. (8) For God is my witness, how I long after you all in [the] bowels of Jesus Christ. (9) And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in full knowledge and all intelligence, (10) that ye may approve the things that are excellent;\* that ye may be pure and without offense against [the] day of Christ, (11) being filled with the fruit of righteousness that [is] by Jesus Christ unto God's praise and glory.

(12) But I wish you to know, brethren, that my affairs have turned out rather for furtherance of the gospel, (13) so that my bonds have been manifest in Christ in the whole of the praetorium and to all the rest; (14) and that the most of the brethren in [the] Lord, being confident by my bonds, more abundantly dare to speak the word fearlessly. (15) Some, indeed, also for envy and strife, but some also for goodwill, preach the Christ: (16) these, indeed, out of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel; (17) but these out of contention announce the Christ, not purely, thinking to stir up tribulation for my bonds. (18) What then? Notwithstanding,

\*Or, "prove the things that differ."

every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is announced, and in this I rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice; (19) for I know that this will turn to me for salvation through your supplication and [the] supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (20) according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed; but in all boldness, as always now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. (21) For to me to live [is] Christ, and to die gain; (22) but if to live in flesh, this to me [is] worth while; and what I shall choose I know not. (23) But I am perplexed by the two, having the desire for departing and being with Christ, for it is very far better; (24) but remaining in the flesh is more necessary on your account; (25) and having this confidence, I know that I shall remain and abide with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; (26) that your boast may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence again with you. (27) Only conduct yourselves worthily of the gospel of Christ; that, whether coming and seeing you or absent, I may hear of your concerns, that ye stand in one spirit, with one soul striving together with the faith of the gospel; (28) and not frightened in anything by the adversaries, which is to them a showing forth of destruction, but to you of salvation, and this from God; (29) because to you has been given on behalf of Christ, not only the believing on him, but also the suffering for him; (30) having the same conflict as ye saw in me and now hear of in me.

II (1) If therefore [there be] any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of [the] Spirit, if any bowels and compassions, (2) fulfill my joy, that ye may mind the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, minding the one thing: (3) nothing in strifefulness, or vainglory, but in lowly-mindedness esteeming one another more excellent than themselves: (4) regarding each not his own things, but each also those of others. (5) For let this mind be in you which [was] also in Christ Jesus; (6) who, being\* in God's form, thought it not an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; (7) but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, being

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\* Or, "subsisting."

come in men's likeness; (8) and being found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (9) Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave him the name that [is] above every name, (10) that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal [beings], (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, unto God [the] Father's glory.

(12) So that, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, with fear and trembling work out your own salvation; (13) for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (14) Do all things without murmurings and reasonings; (15) that ye may be blameless and sincere, irreproachable children of God amidst a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights\*\* in [the] world, (16) holding forth [the] word of life, for a boast to me in Christ's day, that not in vain I ran nor in vain labored. (17) But if also I am poured out upon the sacrifice and ministration of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice with you all; (18) and in the same thing do ye rejoice, and rejoice with me. (19) But I hope in [the] Lord Jesus soon to send Timothy to you, that I also may be cheered knowing about you. (20) For I have none like-minded who will have a genuine care about you; (21) for they all seek their own things, not those of Jesus Christ. (22) But the proof of him ye know, that, as a child a father, with me he served in the gospel. (23) Him therefore I hope to send as soon as I shall see my concerns. (24) But I trust in [the] Lord that I also myself shall come soon. (25) But I thought it necessary to send unto you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-laborer and fellow-soldier, but your messenger and minister to my wants; (26) since he was longing after you all and uneasy because ye heard that he was sick. (27) For indeed he was sick near to death; but God pitied him, and not him only, but me also, that I should not have sorrow upon sorrow. (28) The more diligently therefore I sent him, that seeing him again ye may rejoice and I be the less sorrowful. (29) Receive him therefore in [the] Lord with all joy, and hold such in

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\*\* Or, "light-bearers."



honor; (30) because for the work of Christ he was nigh even to death, endangering his life that he might fill up the remainder of your ministrations toward me.

III (1) For the rest, my brethren, rejoice in [the] Lord. To write these things to you [is] not irksome to me, but safe for you. (2) See to dogs, see to evil workers, see to the concision; (3) for we are the circumcision that worship God in Spirit and boast in Christ Jesus, and have no trust in flesh. (4) Though I have a trusting even in flesh; if any other seem to trust in flesh, I more: (5) in circumcision of eight days, of [the] race of Israel, of [the] tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, according to law a Pharisee, (6) according to zeal persecuting the church, according to righteousness that [is] in law\* blameless. (7) But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss on account of Christ. (8) But moreover also I count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on whose account I lost all things and count them to be refuse that I may win Christ, (9) and be found in him, not having my righteousness that [is] of law, but that [which is] by faith of Christ, the righteousness of God on faith; (10) to know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, (11) if by any means I may arrive at the resurrection that [is] from [the] dead. (12) Not that I already received [it] or am already perfected; but I pursue if I may also lay hold, for that also I have been laid hold of by Christ. (13) Brethren, I do not reckon myself to have laid hold; (14) but one thing—forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue goalward unto the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus. (15) As many therefore as [are] perfect, let us mind this. And if in anything ye are differently minded, this also will God reveal to you. (16) Nevertheless unto what we have attained, walk by the same [, mind the same]. (17) Be joint-imitators of me, brethren, and mark those so walking as ye have us for a pattern. (18) For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, the enemies of the cross of Christ, (19) whose end [is] destruction, whose God

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\*Or, "according to legal righteousness."

[is] the belly, and they glory in their shame, who mind the things of earth. (20) For our commonwealth\*\* has its being in [the] heavens, from whence also we await [as] Saviour [the] Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who shall transform our body of humiliation, conformed to his body of glory according to the working of his ability also to subject all things to him. IV (1) So that, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand in [the] Lord, beloved.

(2) Euodia I exhort, and Syntyche I exhort, to mind the same thing in [the] Lord; (3) yea, I beseech thee also, genuine yokefellow, help them, seeing that they shared my conflicts in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-laborers, whose names are in the book of life.

(4) Rejoice in [the] Lord always: again I will say, rejoice. (5) Let your mildness be known to all men. The Lord [is] near. (6) Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. (7) And the peace of God, that surpasseth every understanding, shall keep your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. (8) For the rest, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever noble, whatsoever just, whatsoever pure, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good report, if there [is] any virtue, and if any praise, these things consider. (9) Those things which ye also learned, and received, and heard, and saw in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you.

(10) But I rejoiced in [the] Lord greatly that now at length ye flourished again in thinking for my interest, while yet also ye did think but had no opportunity. (11) Not that I speak in regard to want; for I learned in the circumstances in which I am to find competence. (12) I know also to be abased, I know also to abound. In everything and in all things I am initiated both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to be in want. (13) In all things I am strong in him that empowereth me. (14) Nevertheless ye did well in sharing with my tribulation. (15) But ye also, O Philippians, know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I came out of Macedonia,

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\*\*Or, "conversation."

no assembly communicated with me for an account of giving and receiving, unless ye alone; (16) for even in Thessalonica both once and twice ye sent for my need. (17) Not that I am seeking the gift, but I am seeking the fruit that aboundeth unto your account. (18) But I have all things and abound; I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. (19) But my God will fully supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (20) Now to our God and Father [be] the glory unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

(21) Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren that [are] with me salute you. (22) All the saints salute you, but especially those of the household of Caesar. (23) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with your spirit. Amen.

## CHAPTER I

Let us seek, with the blessing of God, to develop a little the special features of this epistle on which we now enter. For the better understanding of what comes before us, we may also compare its character with that of others. Some of its features may be gathered from the very first verse. The Apostle introduces himself in the simplest possible manner: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons; grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Elsewhere, even if he presents himself as a servant, he does not fail also to add his apostolic title, or some other distinction by which God had separated him from the rest of his brethren. But here it is not so. He is led of the Holy Ghost to present himself upon the broadest ground to the children of God in Philippi; on this he could fully associate Timotheus with himself. Thus we may gather from the very start of the epistle that we are not to look for the wonderful unfoldings of Christian and Church truth, such as we have in Romans, Corinthians, or Ephesians, where the apostleship of Paul is most carefully stated.

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle" (Rom. 1). He was not an apostle by birth, but by the call of God. He adds further, that they were saints by the very same divine call whereby he was an apostle — "called to be saints," both through the sovereign grace of God. There was nothing in either that could have been an inherent claim upon God. There was deadly sin in both; but the grace of God that had called them to be saints, had called him to be not a saint only, but an apostle. As such, he addresses them in the full consciousness of the place that Christ had given him and them, unfolding the truth from the very first foundations on which the gospel rests, the grace of God, and the ruin of man. Hence in that epistle you have something that more approaches to a doctrinal treatise than in any other portion of the New Testa-

ment. God took care that no apostle ever visited Rome, till there were many saints already there, and then He wrote by the Apostle Paul. The proud imperial city cannot boast of an apostolic foundation; yet, spite of that, man has put in the claim and pressed it with fire and sword. Paul, however, wrote in the fullness of his own apostleship and brings out the truth of God to them most carefully, so that the very ignorance of the Roman saints was the occasion for the Holy Ghost to give us the most elaborate statement of Christian truth which the Word of God contains. By Christian truth, I mean the individual instruction which the soul wants in order to the consciousness of its solid standing before God and the duties which flow from it. There the Apostle writes expressly as an apostle. It could not be understood as a human composition. There must be the authority of God, claimed by the Apostle; and while he strengthens them in their position of saints, by the very same he makes room for that development of Christian truth, for which the epistle is remarkable.

In the Corinthians he addresses them, not merely as saints, as individual Christians, but as an assembly; and there also he asserts his apostleship. Does not this serve to illustrate the truth that there is not a word inserted or omitted in Scripture, but what is full of instruction for our souls if we are willing to be instructed? To the Corinthians he does not add as in Romans, "a servant of Jesus Christ," but simply, "called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God." There he carefully puts Sosthenes upon his own proper ground, as a brother, while he distinguishes his own apostleship. The reason is obvious. The Corinthians were in a turbulent state, going so far as even to gainsay the apostleship of Paul. But God never lowers what He has given because men do not like it. It was a part, not more of God's grace to Paul, than of his humble obedience before God, to act and speak as an apostle; if he had not, he would have failed in his duty; he would not have done that which was essential for the glory of God and the good of the saints. Everything is in its proper place. So if the Corinthians were questioning what God had wrought in and by the Apostle Paul, and the place He had given him in His wisdom, the Apostle asserts it with dignity; or rather, the

Holy Ghost represents him only as an apostle to them, speaks of others but not as apostles, and addresses the Corinthians as "the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

None but one who knew what God is to His saints, and how He holds to the power of His own grace, would have contemplated those at Corinth in such sort as this; none but a heart that understood God's love to His own, and, alas! to what lengths they may be drawn aside where the flesh gains advantage — none but one admirably, divinely acquainted with his own heart and with God — could ever have addressed them in the language with which that epistle opens. But it was God who was writing through His Apostle. And as the conduct of the Church on earth is the thesis of the epistle to the Corinthians, He shows us there the principle of putting away and of receiving again, the administration of the Lord's supper, and its moral meaning; the working of the various gifts in the Church, etc. All these things, as being the functions of the Church, are found in the epistles to the Corinthians. But even in the exercise of gifts, it is gifts *in the assembly*. Therefore, there is no reference to evangelizing in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, because the evangelist's gift does not, of course, find its exercise within the Church. He goes, properly speaking, outside the Church, in order to exercise that gift. You have prophets, teachers, etc. All these were gifts of a still higher order and regularly exercised in the assembly of God.

Here also we shall see how appropriately the preface falls in with the object of the Holy Ghost throughout: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons; grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Now this is the only church where we have the "bishops and deacons" addressed as well as the saints. The reason may have been that it was, more or less, a transition state. We have three things in the Church of the New Testament. The first is — apostles, acting in the full power of their gift and office. Then, besides deacons, bishops or elders (for

these two mean the same officials, only called by a different name), apostolically appointed to the charge which the Lord had given them; the bishops having to do with that which is internal, the deacons with that which is external, but both of them local offices, while the Apostle had his authority from the Lord everywhere. The Holy Ghost shows us thus the full regimen in the churches; that is to say, the apostles acting in their high place, who were called to establish the foundations of the Church practically, and to govern it upon a large scale throughout the whole breadth of the Church of God upon earth; and beside them, these local guides, the bishops and deacons.

Third. The Apostle was now separated from the church, and hence no longer able to watch over the saints personally. He writes accordingly to those who had no longer his apostolic care, not only where they had *not*, but, in this case, where they *had* bishops and deacons. Yet in the latest epistles, where the Apostle is filled with the sense of his speedy departure, there is not the slightest allusion to any provision for perpetuating these officers — not even when writing confidentially to one whom he had called on to ordain elders in Crete, nor to another invested with a charge at Ephesus.

Thus, this epistle brings us to a sort of transition. It supposes the assembly in ecclesiastical order. But the Apostle's absence in person seems to be intended of God to prepare the Church for the absence of apostles entirely. Thus God graciously gave the Church a kind of preparation for their removal from the scene. Practically, even while Paul was on the earth, he was shut out from them, and gone from the scene, as far as regarded apostolic vigilance. The time was coming when there would be no longer apostolically appointed bishops and deacons. The Spirit of God was, it would appear, thereby accustoming the Church to find in God the only stable means of support when apostles would be no longer within reach of those who used to look to them and to claim their wisdom in their difficulties. But though the Apostle was not there, they had the "bishops and deacons," not *a* bishop and several deacons, and still less bishops *and* presbyters (or, priests) and deacons, but several of the higher spiritual guides as well as of the lower.

In those days a bishopric was not a great worldly prize, but

a serious spiritual care which, however excellent an employment, was no object of ambition or means of lucre. "If any man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work"; but it called for such self-denial, such constant trial by night and day, deeper even in the Church than from the world without, that it was by no means a thing for the best qualified in the Spirit to rush into, but to take up with the utmost gravity, as that to which he was called of God. For this, among other reasons, the Church never pretended to choose or constitute a bishop. It was invariably by apostolic authority. One or more apostles acted in this — not necessarily Paul only or the twelve. It might be a Barnabas; at least we find in certain cases Paul and Barnabas acting together in choosing elders or bishops. But this may show what a delicate task it was. The Lord never gives it to any person except an apostle or an apostolic man (that is, a man sent out by an apostle to do that work for him, such as Titus and perhaps Timothy). But there the Scripture account closes; and while we have provision for the Church going on, and the certainty of gifts supplied to the end, there is no means laid down for perpetuating the appointment of elders and bishops.

Was there, then, forgetfulness of ordinary need on the Apostle's, nay, on God's part? For this is really what the matter comes to; and he who supposes that anything of the kind was omitted in Scripture thus carelessly, in effect impeaches the faithful wisdom of God. Who wrote Scripture? Either you resort to the wretched notion that God was indifferent and the apostles forgot, or, acknowledging that Scripture flows from the highest source, you have no escape from the conclusion that God was intentionally silent as to the future supply of elders or bishops. But the God who knew and ordered everything from the beginning forgot nothing; on the contrary, He expressly, in His own wisdom, left no means, in the foreseen ruin of Christendom, for continuing the appointment of elders and deacons. Was it not then desirable, if not necessary, for churches to have such? Surely, if we reason thus, apostles were as loudly called for as the lower officials.

The fact is most evident that the same God who has seen fit to withhold a continuous line of apostles, has not been



pleased to give the means for a scriptural continuance of bishops and deacons. How is it then that we have no such officers now? Most simple is the answer. Because we have no apostles to appoint them. Will you tell me if anybody else has got them? Let us at least be willing to acknowledge our real lack in this respect; it is our duty to God, because it is the truth; and the owning it keeps one from much presumption. For in general Christendom is doing, without apostles, what is only lawful to be done by or with them. The appointment of elders and deacons goes upon the notion that there is an adequate power still resident in men or the Church. But the only scriptural ordaining power is an apostle acting directly or indirectly. Titus or Timothy could not go and ordain elders except as and where authorized by the apostles. Hence when Titus had done this work, he was to come back to the Apostle. He was not in anywise one who had invested in him a certain fund to apply at all times where and how he pleased. Scripture represents that he was acting under apostolic guidance. But after the apostles were gone, not a word about the power acting through these or other delegates of the Apostle.

God forbid that we should pretend either to make an apostle or to make light of his absence! It is more humble to say, We are thankful to use what God has given and whatever God may continue to give, without pretending to more. Is there not faith, and lowliness, and obedience in the position that acknowledges the present want in the Church, and that simply acts according to the power that remains, which is all-sufficient for every need and danger? The true way to glorify God is not to assume an apostolic authority that we do not possess, but to act confiding in the power and presence of the Holy Ghost who does remain. It was distinctly the Lord Himself who, working by the Holy Ghost, acted upon all the saints, and who put each of them in that particular place in the body that He saw fit. It is not a question of our drawing inferences from a man's gifts that he is an apostle. To be an apostle required the express, personal call of the Lord in a remarkable way; and without this there never was adequate ordaining power, personally or by deputy.

As this may help to meet a question that often arises in

the minds of Christians, and suggested by a verse such as we have before us, I have thought it well to meet the difficulty, trusting to the Word and Spirit of God.

The Apostle, then, introduces himself and Timothy as "the servants of Jesus Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus." It is not exactly "to the church," as in writing to the Corinthians or the Thessalonians, but to "all the saints." We may gather from this that he is about to speak of what is individual rather than of what belonged to them as a public assembly; but it is not, as in Romans, on the basis of redemption. He was going to enlarge on their walk with God, saluting them as usual with the words, "grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Before he opens the epistle, the Apostle breaks forth in thanksgiving to God. "I thank my God," an expression often used in this epistle. It also is individual, knowing now the God in whom he trusted, besides being the expression of affection and of nearness. First, says the Apostle, "I thank my God upon my whole remembrance of you" (for such is the true force), "always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy." This leads me to make the observation, that nearness to God is always accompanied by the heart overflowing with the joy which His realized presence necessarily produces, as well as by a spirit of intercession for the objects of God's love on earth. There may be at the same time the deepest exercise of spirit, and not without the keenest pain; because in the presence of God every sin, sorrow, and shame is more truly and fully felt. What God is, is known, and therefore perfect peace; what man is, and therefore the failure is realized and the dishonor brought on Christ is entered into by the Spirit. But here joy is the prevalent and abiding feeling, the great characteristic effect of the presence of God imprinted on the soul, where the conscience is void of offense toward God and man.

Not that even Paul could thus speak of every assembly, or every saint of God — far from it. His whole remembrance of the Philippian saints opened the sluices of thanksgiving to God. Yet, from the beginning, there was need of prayer; and he was continually supplicating for them all, and this with joy, "for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." What

a wonderful thing that a man, though he were the great Apostle of the Gentiles, could so feel, and that there were here below saints of whom he could so write! Alas! in these selfish days we little know what we have lost, and whence we are fallen. He never prayed for these Philippians but with joy, and yet he was constantly bearing them before God. Had the Apostle been here, could he have thought so of us? Yet, wonderful as it was, it was the simple truth; and it is wholesome for our souls to judge ourselves by such a standard.

Another feature of the epistle to the Philippians is, that the practical condition of the soul is here developed more fully than anywhere else; and this not so much doctrinally as in action and experience. The Apostle lays bare his own motives as well as walk, and even Christ's also. Hence it is peculiarly in this epistle that we find displayed the exercise of individual Christian life. Here we have the power of the Spirit of God acting in the soul of the believer, enabling him to realize Christ in the heart and path here below. But what gave rise to this character of instruction? What circumstances brought it out? The absence of the Apostle from the Philippians, and from his ordinary ministry, while he was imprisoned at Rome. It was not, as at Corinth, that his absence brought out their ostentatious vanity, and party spirit, and worldly laxity, and quarrelings. It led the Philippians to feel the necessity of living increasingly with, and for, and to Christ. There was nothing for it but each one looking, and helping his brother to look, to the Lord Himself. This being the effect produced, the Apostle was full of joy in thinking of them. He had been several years away, and externally in the most dismal circumstances himself; but his joy was not dimmed one whit. On the contrary, there is not another epistle so full of actually tasted happiness; and yet there was never an epistle written when all on earth seemed more clouded and filled with sorrow. So thoroughly is Christ the one circumstance that rules all others to the believer.

When moving about and seeing both the devotedness of the saints, and sinners everywhere brought to God, one can understand the Apostle's continual joy and praise. But think of him in prison for years, chained between two soldiers, debarred from the work that he loved, and others taking advantage of his ab-

sence to grieve him, preaching the very gospel out of contention and strife; and yet his heart was so running over with joy that he was filling others with it!

Such is the character of the epistle to the Philippians. If there be a witness of the power of the Spirit of God working through human affections, through the heart of a saint on earth, in the midst of all weakness and trial, it is found here. It is not the picture of a man down under trying circumstances, for under them he never is, but consciously more than conqueror. Not that he never knew what it was to be cast down. He who wrote the second epistle to the Corinthians fully experienced all that which God in His grace made to be a kind of moral preparation for bringing out the comfort that was needed by the saints then and at all times. But this epistle shows us that there is not a single symptom of weariness any more than of perturbation of spirit. You could not tell from it that there was any flesh at all, though he was one who fully took the flesh into account elsewhere, as in Romans and Corinthians, where you have a fearful picture of what may be the condition of the Christian and of the Church.

Not only in Philippians is there no trace of this, but neither is there the dwelling upon our privileges and blessings, as in Ephesians 1. What we have is the enjoyed power of the Spirit of God, that lifts a man day by day above the earth, even when he is walking upon it; and this by making Christ everything to the soul, so that the trials are but occasions of deeper enjoyment, let them be ever so many and grave. This is what we specially want as Christians in order to glorify God; and this is what the Holy Ghost urges on us when we have entered into our proper Christian birthright, individually, as in Romans, and our membership of the Church, as in Corinthians, and our blessing in heavenly places in Christ, as in Ephesians.

Then comes the question, How am I enjoying and carrying out these wondrous privileges, as a saint of God upon earth? To suppose that this is a hard question, and gendering bondage, would be to impeach the perfect goodness of God, as well as to fall into a snare of the devil. What God desires is that we should be blest yet more than we are. He would thus make us more happy. The epistle to the Philippians is one to fill the heart

with joy, if there be an eye for Christ. He thanks his God for them for their "fellowship with the gospel from the first day until now." What going out of heart, and sustained vigor! It is not now "the fellowship of His Son," as in 1 Corinthians, which indeed would be true of a Christian under any circumstances. So if Satan had contrived to turn a saint again to folly and sin, the Holy Ghost could remind him that God is faithful by whom he was called unto the fellowship of His Son. And can *He* have fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness? This is the reason why we should cry to God that, if He have called any to the fellowship of His Son, He would not allow the enemy to drag them into the dirt, but rouse their conscience to their grievous inconsistency.

But there is more. Here it is their fellowship with the gospel, not merely as a blessed message they had received themselves, but in its progress, conflicts, dangers, difficulties, etc. It does not necessarily mean preaching it, but, what was as good, or in itself even better — their hearts thoroughly in and with it. Need I hesitate to say that whatever may be the honor put upon those called to spread the gospel, to have a heart in unison with the gospel is a portion superior to any services as such? Most simply and heartily were the Philippians' affections thus bound up with the gospel; they identified themselves first and last with its career. This was really fellowship with God in the spread of His own glad tidings through the world. The Apostle valued such hearts especially. Nothing less than the sustaining power of the Spirit of God had so wrought in these dear Philippians.

The way in which the gospel had reached them we hear in Acts 16. It began with Paul in prison, when his feet were in the stocks; yet withal, in the midst of shame and pain, he and his companion singing praises to God at midnight! And here we have him, if alone, again a prisoner; and the praises of God are again heard—unwontedly in the great city of Rome. The Philippians were far away; but he could hear them, as it were none the less, singing praises to God, even as he was singing praises to God for them. It was the same blessed fellowship with the gospel that had characterized not him only, but them too, from the very first day until now.

But he goes further, and says, "Being confident of this very

thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will complete it against the day of Jesus Christ." Remark the ground of his confidence. In the Corinthians it is because God was faithful. In Galatians, where there was a still a more serious trial, the Apostle says he was in doubt of them, till he thinks of the Lord; and then he has his heart lit up with a comforting hope that they were Christians after all. People that were practically slighting (little as they thought or intended it, yet virtually slighting) Christ for worldly elements — he could hardly understand how such could be Christians. To turn from a crucified and risen Christ to the rites of an earthly religion is worse than bare earthliness, destructive as this is. Here it is another thing. His confidence is grounded not merely on what God is in character and counsel, but on what he saw of Christ, by the Holy Ghost, in them. Thinking of what they had been and were then, could he hesitate to recognize the evident handiwork of God through His Son? He saw such an unequivocal enjoyment of Christ, and such an identification of interests with Him upon earth, that his confidence was not only in a general way that he would see them with Christ by-and-by, but in the solidity of the work of God in them all the way through. He who had begun in them a good work, he was sure, would complete it unto (or, against) the day of Jesus Christ (v. 6).

"Even as it is meet" (or, "just") "for me to think thus of you all, because ye have me in your heart." v. 7. Such is the version given in the margin, which here prevents the right force of the verse. It was due to them, he means, not merely because he loved them, but he felt and had proof that they had him in their hearts. A blessed bond for hearts at all times is the name of Christ and His gospel. How continually, too, one finds the state of the saints accurately measured and set in evidence by the state of their affections toward anyone that is identified with the work of God on the earth! There will be the strongest possible attempt of Satan to bring an alienation of feeling and a turning of the saints against all such, whether absent or present. It was so in the days of the Apostle Paul; those who were simply cleaving to the Lord clave to him also. It was the very reverse of a mere fleshly feeling, which was sought by his adversaries who, flattering others, were flattered in turn. Paul was

perfectly sensible that the more abundantly he loved, the less he was loved; and what a handle this gave to Satan to turn away the saints from the truth.

False teachers and men who may be really converted, but whose flesh is little judged, and whose worldliness is great, always seek to win persons as a party round themselves, by sparing the flesh and humoring the natural character, so as at last to have their own way without question. (2 Cor. 11:19, 20.) The Apostle's object was to win to Christ. But faithfulness called him often to tread on what was painful to one and another. As long as love flowed freely and Christ was looked to, it was well; but when mortified feeling wrought, because they did not mortify their members on the earth, the tendency was constantly toward making parties, divisions, offenses, the forerunners of yet worse evil. But if the Apostle was one who scorned such a thought as gathering a party round himself, these saints had him in their hearts.

He valued this love. How was it shown? "Inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye are all partakers of my grace." They were casting themselves, heart and soul, into the activities and sufferings of the grace of God in the Apostle. Did his bonds make them ashamed or suspicious? To have a friend in gaol never was of good report. Did they begin to say in themselves, He must have been doing something wrong because he was a prisoner? On the contrary, seeing that the Apostle Paul had come into the deepest suffering, they looked upon it as the highest honor. If he had gone up to Jerusalem, it was not to spare himself; and though this visit may have been a mistake, certainly it was one of which no person ought to speak lightly. It was a thorough self-sacrifice every step of the way. The Apostle, though he was now as a consequence a prisoner in Rome, never yields to a spirit of regret, still less of repining, but regards all in the good hand of God as furthering the cause of Christ. Did not, for example, his own bonds turn to praise of God? There he was perfectly happy, perhaps never so happy as thus bound. The Philippian saints understood what it was to draw from the divine spring; and consequently their hearts were with him in joy as well as sympathy. Did it weaken the Apostle's love for them personally?

"God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." v. 8. Happiness as the Lord's prisoner dulled none of his warmest feelings of love toward them.

But besides all this, his love for them made him intensely solicitous about their real wants, and he turns to the Lord for them accordingly. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment." v. 9. He wished that they should love (not less, but) with a fuller knowledge and an exercised intelligence. Love, or charity, is the basis, else there would be no building up; this being laid and abounding, full knowledge, instead of puffing up, guides and guards. The more the intelligence is, if it be real and spiritual, the greater the desire to grow in it. Those who do not see anything in Scripture as an object for constant search, and growth, and desire after more, are those, it is to be feared, who see scarce anything in it that is divine. Directly it is discerned that there is infinite light in it, desire to know more and more is a necessary consequence. But it is for practice. And this epistle shows us spiritual progress in the Apostle and in the saints more fully than any other, while it is the epistle that shows us the strongest desire after going on. This is what we know from experience. Whenever we begin to be satisfied with what we have got, there is an end of progress; but when we make a little real advance, we want to make more. Such was the case with these saints, who are prayed for therefore, "That ye may approve things that are excellent," etc. They needed to grow in intelligence, in order that they might be able to judge of things, and so lay hold of what was more excellent.

"That ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." v. 10. Wonderful thought! The Apostle actually prays for these believers as if he conceived it possible that, growing in love and intelligence, they might walk the path of faith till the day of Christ without a single false step; Paul's marvel, perhaps, would have been that we should count it wonderful. Alas! we know we fail day by day, because we are unspiritual. Why do we let out a vain word or show a wrong feeling? Because we are not realizing the presence and the grace of God. No progress in the things of God will ever keep a person — nothing but actual nearness to Him and dependence on Him. What is a



Christian, and what the condition and experience which Scripture recognizes for him here below? He is by grace brought, in virtue of Christ's blood, into the presence of God; who has a power within him, the Holy Ghost, and a power without to lean upon, even the Lord Jesus Christ, and this uninterruptedly and always. Such is the theory; but what is the practice? As far as it is realized, the path is without a single stumble. And let us remember that such is the only sanctioned path for all saints. It belongs not of right to some advanced souls. It is what every Christian has to desire. We can, therefore, readily understand how souls, hearing such thoughts as these, should embrace the idea of a state of perfection. But though the scheme is erroneous and utterly short of our true standard in the second Man, the last Adam, a Christian ought never contentedly to settle down in the thought that he must fail and sin day by day. What is this but calm acquiescence with dishonoring Christ? If we do fail, let us at least always say, It was our own fault, our own unwatchfulness, through not making use of the grace and strength we have in Christ. The treasure there is open for us, and we have only to draw upon it; and the effect is a staid, calm, spiritual progress, the flesh judged, the heart overflowing with happiness in Christ, the path without a stumble till the day of Christ.

More than this, let it be remarked, he prays that they might be filled with the *fruit* of righteousness, not merely such and such righteous acts in detail, but the blessed product of righteousness by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God (v. 11). There is no thought of, nor room for, imposing the law here, which is rather shut out from being the proper standard for the Christian. There is another, who is both our new object and our rule, even Christ Himself, the image of God, the life and power of fruit bearing for the believer. What a rule for our practical, everyday walk!

From the introduction, which bears ample witness of the Apostle's love in the Spirit to the Philippian saints of his confidence in them and his earnest desire for them, we enter on the first great topic on which he writes — his own condition at Rome. He felt that it was needful to lay it before them in the light of the Lord, not merely because of their affectionate solici-

tude, not only again because of evil workers, who would gladly make it a handle against himself and his ministry; but chiefly with the holy and loving end of turning it to their profit and even their establishment in the truth and diligence in the work and singleness of purpose in cleaving to the Lord.

Indeed the Apostle had every ground to expect a blessing through that which Satan was perverting to injure souls. It had already issued in good fruit as regarded the work of the gospel; and he looks for just as good fruit as to all that concerned himself, either in the present or in the future, whether by life or by death. Such is the confidence and joy of faith. It overcomes the world; it realizes Christ's victory over the enemy. What can man, what can Satan, do with one who is careful about nothing, but in everything gives thanks? What can either avail to disconcert one whose comfort is in God and who interprets all circumstances by His love, with unshaken reliance on His wisdom and goodness?

Such a one was the Apostle, who now proceeds to turn for the salvation of the saints at Philippi, so tenderly loved, what the malice of Satan and of his instruments would be sure to catch at greedily as a means of alarming some and stumbling others, as if God too cared not for His Church or His servant. It is experience we have unfolded rather than doctrine; it is the rich, and mellow, and mature fruit of the Spirit in the Apostle's own heart as he expounds to them the facts of his own daily life according to God. What a privilege to hear! and how sweet to know that it was not written merely, nor as much, to inform us of him as to conform the saints practically to Christ thereby! Blessedly as the lesson was learned in the bonds that lay upon Paul, for our sakes, no doubt, it has been written. Therefore was the Apostle inspired. Inspiration, however, does not exclude the heart's holy feelings.

"But I wish you to know, brethren, that my condition (literally, what concerns me) has turned out rather (that is, rather than otherwise) unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds have become manifest in Christ in the whole pretorium and to all the rest." vv. 12, 13. The devil had hoped to merge the Apostle in the common crowd of criminals; but God, ever watchful for good, made it plain that His servant

was a prisoner for no moral offense, but because of Christ. Thus the enemy's cunning device had ended in a testimony for the Saviour, and the gospel penetrated where before it was wholly unknown. His bonds were manifestly in Christ's cause. The grace of Christ was made known, and His servant was vindicated.

But this was not all. For as the Apostle tells them further, "Most of the brethren in the Lord, having confidence in my bonds, dare more abundantly to speak the word without fear." v. 14. Here was another step in the blessing, and of rich promise too. How unexpected of the enemy! He, however, was on the alert; and if he could not silence the tongues that bore their testimony to the Saviour, would not fail to bring in mixed motives and tempt some to an unhallowed spirit and aim, even in a work so holy. It was not undiscerned of the Apostle; neither did it disturb in the least his triumphant assurance that all things were working together for good, not only to them that love God, but to the advance of the glad tidings of His grace; so this too he does not hide in sorrow or shame, but cheerfully explains. "Some indeed also on account of envy and strife, but some also on account of goodwill, preach the Christ; these indeed out of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel; but those out of contention, proclaim the Christ, not purely, supposing to stir up tribulation for my bonds." vv. 15-17.

The truth is that the Apostle was then and there in the happiest enjoyment of that truth which, not so long before, he had held before the saints at Rome. He was glorying in tribulations by the way, as well as in the hope of God's glory at the end; and not only so, but glorying *in God* through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1, 2, 11). His bonds but proved how entirely the liberty of grace is independent of all that man or Satan can rage against him who stands fast in it and has Him before his heart, by whom alone it came and could be given. There was no blindness to the feelings of some whose zeal in no way concealed their malevolent desires; but nothing weakened the spring of his joy in God, nor his thankful perception that, whatever *man* meant, the testimony of grace was going out widely and energetically; and Christ was held up and exalted more and more. For it was no question here of doctrine; there is no ground

to think that even the contentious men did not preach soundly. It was the good that God intended that occupied Paul's thoughts, whatever might be in theirs. Hence he breaks forth in that blessed expression of an unselfish, full heart, "What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretext or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice, yea and will rejoice." v. 18. How happy is the simplicity, how deep the wisdom of faith, which thus sees in everything, even where flesh intrudes into the Lord's work, the defeat of Satan! What a present blessing to his soul who, thus delivered from self-confidence on the one hand and anxiety on the other, sees the sure, steady, onward working of God for the glory of Christ, even as by-and-by when Christ is displayed in His kingdom, all will be ordered to the glory of God the Father! (Chap. 2.) Hence in the consciousness of the progress of gospel testimony and his own blessing through all that to which his imprisonment had given occasion, the Apostle can say, "I know that this will turn to my salvation through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; according to my earnest expectation, and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but, in all boldness, as always, now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." vv. 19, 20. Imprisoned, he could not separate himself from the mighty conflict which was on foot in the world; he knew victory was assured, however hotly the enemy might contest. Salvation here means the final defeat of the enemy, and so it is throughout our epistle, never a past thing as in Ephesians 2 and 2 Timothy 1:9, but always future, as in chapters 2 and 3, manifestly. In Philippians, as in Hebrews, etc., it is the full deliverance at the close. Both views are true, and each has its own importance.

We have seen the expectation and hope of the Apostle, that in nothing he should be ashamed, but in all boldness as always, now also Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. His eye was thus on Christ, not for the beginning and the end only, but all the way. In the next verse, 21, he proceeds to vindicate the confidence of his heart. For, says he, "to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." To be spiritually minded, the Apostle tells us elsewhere, is life and peace. Here, speaking of his own daily practice, he shows he had but one

aim, motive, object, and business — Christ. And this was said, not at the start of his career, in the overwhelming sense of the Saviour's grace to His proud and self-righteous persecutor, but after long years of unequalled toil, peril, affliction without and sorrows within the Church. "To me to live is Christ." No doubt, the principle was true from the beginning of his eventful life as a Christian. Still, as little do I doubt that it was emphatically and more than ever verified at the very time he was writing, a prisoner in the imperial city.

It is remarkable to what debates and difficulties the verse has given occasion, though the language is plain, the construction unambiguous, and sense as weighty as it is clear. "Interpreters [says a famous man] have hitherto, in my opinion, given a wrong rendering and exposition to this passage; for they make this distinction, that Christ was life to Paul and death was gain." Certainly this is not the meaning of the Holy Ghost who gave the Apostle to say that to him to live (that is, here below) is Christ and to die gain. That Christ was his life is most true, and is the doctrine of Galatians and Colossians in passages full of beauty and interest. (See Gal. 2; Col. 3.) But here it is no question of doctrine, standing, or life in Christ. The whole matter is the character of his living day by day; and this he declares is "Christ," even as the ceasing to live or to die, he says, would be "gain." And what does this writer substitute? "I, on the other hand, make Christ the subject of discourse in both clauses, so that He is declared to be gain to him both in life and in death; for it is customary with the Greeks to leave the word *pros* to be understood. Besides that this meaning is less forced, it also corresponds better with the foregoing statement, and contains more complete doctrine. He declares that it is indifferent to him whether he lives or dies, because, having Christ, he reckons both to be gain. So Calvin, followed by Beza, who adds that "Christ" is the subject of both members and "gain" the predicate, and that the ellipse of *kata* is not only tolerable but an Atticism! The reader may rest assured that a more vicious and violent rendering has rarely been offered. The truth is that "to live" is the subject, "Christ" the predicate of the first proposition; "to die" is the subject, "gain" the predicate of the second, as in the authorized version. The real force is lost by this strange dislo-

cation of the French reformers, and the true connection is broken.

"For me to live is Christ and to die gain; but if to live in flesh is before me, this to me is worth the while; and what I shall choose, I know not, but I am pressed by the two, having the desire for departing and being with Christ, for it is far better, but to continue in the flesh is more needful for you. And having confidence of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in your faith, that your boast may abound in Christ Jesus through me by my presence again with you." vv. 21-26. Thus the Apostle compares his continuance in life with dying; the former were to him worth while, and what to choose he could not say. Thus there was perplexity from the two things; for he certainly had the desire to slip all that anchored him here and to be with Christ; whereas, on the other hand, he felt that his abiding here would be more necessary on account of the saints. This is no sooner fairly before him than all is clear. There is no more pressure from two sides. He is confident; he knows he will remain and stay with them all for their progress and joy in their faith. How sweet and disinterested is the love which the Holy Ghost gives to the heart that is centered on Christ! Their spiritual interest turns the scale, whatever his personal desire.

Sure I am that we have most of us lost much by failing to realize that to us too this path is open, and that it is the will of our God concerning us. Too little are any of us conscious of the weakening, darkening, deadening effect on our spiritual experience of allowing any object or desire but Christ. How often, for instance, it seems to be taken for granted that a brief season after conversion is not only the due time for first love, but the only time when it is to be expected! In what bright contrast with all such thoughts stands the record we have read of the blessed Apostle's experience! Was it not meant for the Philipians? Is it not also for us? God never intimates in His Word that the saint must droop after conversion; that love, zeal, simplicity of faith must become increasingly poorer and weaker. There are dangers no doubt; but early days have theirs as well as later, and much passes muster at first through lack of spirituality. Where there is full purpose of heart in cleaving to the Lord, He

gives, on the contrary, a deepening acquaintance with Himself. It is not, To me to live is for the gospel or even the Church, but, "To me to live is *Christ*." To have Him as the one absorbing, governing motive of the life, day by day, is the strength as well as test of all that is of God; it gives, as nothing else can give, everything its divine place and proportion. "To me to live is Christ" seems to me much more than to say, "To die is gain." For *this* is true of many a saint's experience, who could hardly say *that*. Yet there is not a clause more characteristic; it is the very pith of our epistle. Christian experience is the point. In Philippians, above all others, it is the development of the great problem, how we are to live Christ. As for Paul, it was the one thing he did; and so death, which naturally threatens the loss of this and that and all things, he, on the contrary, realized to be gain. This is the truth, and he enjoyed it.

For years the Apostle, a prisoner, had death before him as a not improbable contingency. Yet assuredly his eye is only the brighter, his strength not abated, but grown, his exercised acquaintance with God, His will and ways, larger than ever. Hence, instead of his thinking it was a question for the emperor to determine, he sees, feels, and speaks as if God had put it all into his own hands; just as in another chapter he says, "I can do all things through Christ (or Him) who strengthens me." Here you have him sitting in judgment on the point whether he is to live or die. He drops Caesar altogether and views it as if God were asking His servant whether he was going to live or die. His answer is that it would be much better for himself to die, but that for the sake of the Church it would be expedient for him to live somewhat longer. Thus the decision of the question is eminently Christlike, against his own strong desire, because his eye was single, and he sacrificed self for the good of the Church. Accordingly he concludes, with wonderful faith and unselfishness, that he is going to live.

"I am in a strait between the two, having the desire for departing and being with Christ, which is very far better: nevertheless to continue in the flesh is more needful for you." Inasmuch as in his heart Christ thus predominated, who certainly was not balancing questions about his own gain, but other people's good; so Paul, therefore, thinks of and in His mind

and says, "Having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith: that your boast may be more abundant in Jesus Christ through me by my presence with you again." I do not know a more astonishing and instructive proof of the power of the Spirit of God, in giving a man fellowship practically with God. The flesh being broken and judged in him, he could enter into the mind and feelings of God, and Christ's heart about the Church. Was it really desirable for the Church that Paul should abide? Then, without hesitation and without fleshly feeling, he can say, Paul will abide. Thus he settles the matter and speaks calmly and confidently of seeing them again. Yet is it a man in prison, exposed to the most reckless of Roman emperors, who thinks, decides, says all this!

At the same time he adds, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for (or rather with) the faith of the gospel." His heart's desire, when he came and saw them again, was to see them all unitedly happy, and not only this flowing in of Christ, but such a flowing out of Him that their hearts should be free to spread the knowledge of the gospel everywhere.

Next, he wished to hear that they were frightened in nothing by the adversaries, which is to them a proof of destruction, but "of your salvation, and this from God, because unto you is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." From this scripture it is evidently of great moment spiritually that we should keep up in our souls good courage in face of the foe, and confidence in God, not only for our own sake, but for others. There is no testimony more gracious, nor more solemn to our adversaries. But how blessed to know that the day comes when, if we are walking with God, every opposer, no matter how proud, will disappear; when all the malice, and wiles, and power that can be brought to put the saints down will only elicit the power of God in their favor! Faith knows all the power of God is its own before that day comes.

It is of the greatest importance that we should cherish calm,



and lowly, and patient confidence in God, and that the heart should rest in His love; but this can never be, unless there be present subjection to Christ and enjoyment of what He is toward our souls. To their adversaries this boldness was a demonstration of perdition, as well as of their own final triumph over all that Satan could aim at their hurt. God intended this, because it was given them in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake. Paul, who was suffering for Christ's sake at that very moment, was thoroughly happy in it, and commends the place to them. It was a good gift of grace; he could say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places," though he was a prisoner. They had the same conflict as they saw in him when a prisoner at Philippi and now heard of in Rome. May our own souls prize this blessed place, if the Lord vouchsafe it in any measure to us!

## CHAPTER II

We saw in chapter 1 how refreshing to the Apostle was the state of the Philippians, looked at as a whole; for, undoubtedly, there was that which needed correction in particular cases. Still their practical condition, and more especially as shown in the fellowship of the gospel, drew out powerfully his affections to them, as indeed their own were drawn out. Now this very fellowship bore witness to the healthful and fervent state of their souls toward the Lord, His workmen, and His work. For fellowship with the gospel is a great deal more than merely helping on the conversion of souls. Babes that are just born to God, souls that have made ever so little progress in the truth, are capable of feeling strong sympathy with the calling in of the lost, with the glad tidings flowing out to souls, with the joy of newly quickened and pardoned souls brought to the knowledge of Christ. But there was much more implied in the Philippians' "fellowship with the gospel." It is plain that the bent and strength of their whole life was that of persons who thoroughly identified themselves with its conflicts and sorrows as well as its joys. There was nothing in them so to arrest and occupy the Spirit of God, that they could not be in the very same current with Himself, in the magnifying of Christ and the blessing of souls.

And thus it was that they were privileged to have fellowship with the Apostle himself. "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." All these things had been in action, and the Apostle viewed each little offering to him, while he was in prison for the gospel's sake, in the light of Christ's holy, spiritual affections which had dictated it. In the case of the Philippians, it would appear that it was not merely the way in which the grace of God values the service of the saints. He interpreted it, not according to the thoughts of the saints, but

according to His own, seeing, therefore, far deeper value in it than the human spirit had which had been led of the Holy Ghost in the service.

Take, for instance, Mary in the gospels, and the way in which the blessed Saviour viewed her act of devotedness in spending upon His Person the box of precious ointment which she had reserved for that time. Where there is singleness of eye, there is One guiding the saints, though they may not know it distinctly. There is no ground to suppose Mary distinctly appreciated that she was anointing the Lord for His burial; but His divine grace gave it that value. The love that was in her heart felt instinctively that some awful danger threatened Him; that a heavy dark cloud was gathering over Him, which others feebly, if at all, entered into. In truth, God was in this intuition of divine affection.

But you may see something, perhaps, analogous in the providential care which God by times exercises; and there is even more than providence in the care of a Christian parent with a child. There is a feeling of undefined but real uneasiness — the Spirit of God giving a certain consciousness of peril — and this often calls forth the affection of the parents to the child in such sort as to avert the imminent danger or alleviate the sufferings in the highest degree. In a still higher sense this was true in the dealings of God with Mary. Alas! little indeed were the disciples in the secret, though they ought to have known what was impending more than any others, had it been a question of familiar intercourse and knowledge.

Certainly they had larger opportunities than ever Mary enjoyed; but it is far from being such knowledge that gives the deepest insight — far from being earthly circumstances that account for the insight of love. There is a cause which lies deeper still — the power of the Spirit of God acting in a simple, upright, loving heart, that feels intensely for the object of its reverence, for Christ Himself. If our eye is to our Lord, we may be sure that He will work with and in us as well as for us. He will not fail to give us the opportunity for serving Him in the most fitting manner and at the right moment. Mary had this box we know not how long; but there was One who loved Mary, and who wished to vouchsafe her the desired

privilege of showing her love to His Son. He it was who led Mary (despised as indifferent by her believing but bustling sister) at this very time to bring out her love. Thus, besides ordinary intelligent guidance, there may be guidance under the skillful hands of Him who cares for us, and now acts yet more intimately by His Spirit dwelling in us.

In the case of the Philippians, there was the conscious fellowship of the Spirit; there was remarkable devotedness and spirituality among them, so that God could put particular honor upon them. In this respect they are in striking contrast not only with the Galatians but with the Corinthians also. Not that but these two were born of God; there was no difference in this. We are expressly told the Corinthians were called into the fellowship of the Son of God; such they were as truly as the Philippians were. It is of them that the Holy Ghost says, "God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." But there was a mighty difference here. There was not the same fellowship with the gospel among the Corinthians, and therefore it may be that the Apostle desires that they might have "the communion of the Holy Ghost" (2 Cor. 13:14). Assuredly till then it had been enjoyed by them scantily. (Compare 1 Cor. 3; 4; etc.)

But in looking at the Philippians he could say, "If there be therefore any consolation [or rather encouragement] in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit," etc. There was all this practical display of Christ so fully at work among them; such tenderness in their spirit, such entering into the mind of God touching the mighty conflict in which the Apostle was engaged, that they identified themselves heart and soul with the Apostle. He says, therefore, If there be all this (which he doubted not but assumed), "fulfill ye my joy that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Here was their failure; they were not sufficiently of one mind; nor were they cherishing, as they should, the same love. Hence there was a measure of dissension among them at this time. True, it may seem to have been about the work of the Lord, in which they were truly zealous. Sorrowful as this was in itself, still this was not so low and unworthy as mere squabbling with one another, such as we hear of among

the Corinthians. Not that it was to be treated lightly, but even the very failure and the cause of it proved that they were in a more spiritual state than the Corinthians.

In the same way you may find among the children of God now that which answers to the trial of an Abraham or of a Lot. Just Lot, dwelling among the wicked in the cities of the plain, was vexed from day to day with their unrighteous and ungodly deeds. What unbridled wickedness filled the scene which first attracted his too covetous eyes! Strange that a saint could find his home there for a season! Abraham failed, no doubt; but what a contrast even between the failure of an Abraham and of a Lot! When the latter, through unwatchfulness, fell into a sin which led the way to worse, it was not only a painful blot, but the consequences of it remained for ages to be adversaries to the people of God. Out of the miserable circumstances which closed his life, we see a shameful result and a constant affliction. Indeed the Israel of God will prove it yet in the latter days. On the other hand, Abraham had his trials and failures, and surely the Lord did notice and rebuke them in His righteous government. But though this shows that there is nothing worthy of God in man, that no good thing dwells in the natural man, even of a saint, that the flesh is fleshly, let it be in whom it may; yet, for all that, the character of Abraham's very slips and unfaithfulness tells us that he was in a spiritual condition wholly different from his nephew Lot.

Just so it was, in measure, with the Corinthians and the Philippians. In the latter there was a want of unity, of judgment, and mind, but they were filled with the fervor of the Spirit; they were carried out in earnest wishes for the gospel and the good of God's people. Thus, even where you find the service of the Lord the prominent thought, there is always room for the flesh to act. There is nothing like having Christ Himself for our object. This was what Paul knew and lived in, and wished them to know better. Service brings in room for the human mind and feelings and energy. We are in danger of being occupied unduly with that which we do or what we suffer. Behind it lurks also the dangers of comparison, and so of envy, self-seeking, and strife. How blessedly the Apostle in Chapter 1 laid before them his feeling in presence of a far deeper,

wider and more painful experience, we have seen already. It appears there was something of this kind at work among the Philippians. Accordingly he here intimates to them that there was something necessary to complete his joy. He would see them of the same mind, and this by having not the same notions but the same love, with union of soul minding one thing. His own spirit was enjoying Christ increasingly. The earth, and man upon it, was a very little thing before his eyes; the thoughts of heaven were everything to him, so that he could say, "To me to live is Christ." This made his heart sensitive on their account, because there was something short of Christ, some objects besides Him in them. He desires fullness of joy in them.

The Spirit of God gives hearts, purified by faith, a common object, even Christ. What he had known in them made him the more alive to that which was defective in these saints. He therefore makes a great deal of what he might have withheld if writing to others. In an assembly where there was much that dishonored God, it would be useless to notice every detail. Wisdom would apply the grace of Christ to the overwhelming evils that met one's eye; lesser things would remain to be disposed of afterward by the same power. But in writing to saints in a comparatively good state, even a little speck assumes importance in the mind of the Spirit. There was something they might do or remedy to fill the cup of the Apostle's joy. How gladly he would hear that they shone in unity of spirit! He owned and felt their love; would that they cultivated the same mutually! How could they be more likeminded? If the mind were set upon one thing, they would all have the same mind. God has one object for His saints, and that object is Christ. With Paul, every aim, every duty was subordinate to Him; as it is said in the next chapter, "this one thing I do"; so here he wished to produce this one, common mind in the Philippian saints.

He then touches on that which they had to watch against. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory." It is humbling, but too true, that the principle of the grossest evil outside works even among the saints of God. The traces might be so faint that none but an apostle's eye could perceive them. But God enabled His servant to discern in them what was not of

Christ. Hence he sets before them the dangers alike of opposing one another and of exalting self, strife, and vainglory. Oh! how apt they are to creep in and sully the service of God! The chapter before had shown some elsewhere taking advantage of the Apostle's bonds to preach Christ of envy and strife. And there he had triumphed by faith and could rejoice that, any how, Christ was preached. Now he warns the beloved Philippians against something similar in their midst. The principle was there, and he does not fail to lay it upon their heart.

How is the spirit of opposition and self-exaltation to be overcome? "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." What a blessed thought! and how evidently divine! How could strife or vainglory exist along with it? When one thinks of self, God would have one to feel our own amazing shortcomings. To have such sweet and heavenly privileges in Christ, to be loved by Him, and yet to make such paltry returns as even our hearts know to be altogether unworthy of Him, is our bitter experience as to ourselves. Whereas when we look at another, we can readily feel not only how blessedly Christ is for him, and how faithful is His goodness, but love leads us to cover failings, to see and keep before us that which is lovely and of good report in the saints — if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, to think on *these* things. This appears to lie at the root of the exhortation, and it is evident that it thus becomes a simple and happy duty. "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

In short, it is made good on the one hand by the consciousness of our own blessing through grace in presence of our miserable answer to it in heart and way; and on the other hand, by the thankful discernment of another beheld as the object of the Lord's tender love and all its fruits, without the thought of drawbacks. Of their evil the Lord would not have us to think, but of what Christ is to and in them. For here there is no question of discipline, but of the ordinary, happy state of God's children. Certainly the Philippian assembly consisted of men who were full of simple-hearted earnestness in pushing out the frontiers of Christ's kingdom and whose hearts were rejoicing in Him. But toward one another there was the need of greater tenderness.

Besides, if one more than others was abused everywhere, it was the Apostle Paul. He was pre-eminently treated as the off-scouring of all things. All Asia was turned away from him. Where was there a man to identify himself with his cause? Evidently this was the result of a faithful, self-denying, holy course in the gospel, which from time to time offended hundreds even of the children of God. He could not but touch the worldliness of one, the flesh of another. Above all, he roused the judaizers on one hand, and on the other all schismatics, heretics, etc. All this makes a man dreaded and disliked; and none ever knew more of this bitter trial than the Apostle Paul. But in the case of the Philippians there was the contrary effect. Their hearts clave to him so much the more in the hour of his imprisonment at Rome, when there was this far sorer sorrow of an amazing alienation on the part of many who had been blessed through his means. This faithful love of the Philippians could not but rejoice the Apostle's heart.

It is one thing to indulge a fleshly dependence upon an instrument of God, quite another to have the same interests with him, so as to be knit more closely than ever in the time of sorrow. This was fellowship indeed, as far as it went; and it did go far, but not so far as the Apostle desired for them. He thought of their things, not of his merely; and accordingly, he now gives them another word: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." If they loved *him* so much, why not love *each other* more than they did? Why so occupied with their own thoughts?

This egotism was another fertile source of evil. We all know that we are apt to value qualities which we possess ourselves and to slight those of others. This is unjudged nature; for, where there is power of love, it works in a direction quite the contrary. There would be the consciousness of how weak and unworthy we are, and the little use we make of what God gives us; there would be the valuing of what we see in another, that we have not got ourselves. How good for the Church to have all this and far more!

There he brings in what is the great secret of deliverance from all these strivings of potsherd nature — "the mind that was in Christ Jesus" (v. 5). In this chapter you will observe



it is Christ as He was; in the next it is Christ as He is. Here it is Christ coming down, though of course He is thereon exalted. The point pressed is that we should look at the mind of Christ that was displayed in Him while here below. In chapter 3 it is not so much the mind or moral purpose that was in Him, as it is His Person as an object, a glorious, attractive object now in heaven, the prize for which he was running, Christ Himself above, the kernel of all his joy. Here (chap. 2) it is the unselfish mind of love that seeks nothing of its own, but the good of others at all costs; this is the mind that was in Christ.

The Apostle proceeds to enforce lowliness in love, by setting the way of the Lord Himself before their eyes. This is the true "rule of life" for the believer since His manifestation; not even all the written Word alone, but that Word seen livingly in Christ, who is made a spring of power by the Holy Ghost to his soul that is occupied with Him. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal [on equality] with God; but made himself of no reputation [emptied himself]," etc. vv. 5-7.

What an illustrious testimony to the true, proper, intrinsic deity of Christ! It is all the stronger because, like many more, it is indirect. Who but a person consciously God in the highest sense could adopt not merely the unhesitating assumption of such language as "Before Abraham was, I am," or, "I and my Father are one," but the no less real, though hidden, claim to Godhead which lies under the very words which unbelief so eagerly seizes against Him? Where would be the sense of any other man (and man He surely was and is) saying, "My Father is greater than I"? A strange piece of information in the mouth (I will not say of a Socrates or a Bacon merely, but) of a Moses or a Daniel, a Peter or a Paul; but in Him, how suitable and even needful, yet only so because He was truly God and equal with the Father, as He was man, the sent One, and so the Father was greater than He! Take again that striking declaration in John 17:3, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, *and Jesus Christ*, whom thou hast sent." Of course He was man, He deigned to be born of woman, else unbelief would have no ground of argument on that score. But what mere man ever dared, save the vilest imposter, calmly

to class himself with God, yea, to speak of the knowledge of the only true God, *and of Him*, as life everlasting?

So again, the scripture before us. Nothing can be conceived more conclusively to prove His own supremely divine glory than the simple statement of the text. Gabriel, yea, the archangel Michael, has no higher dignity than that of *being* God's servant, in the sphere assigned to each. The Son of God alone had to empty Himself, *taking* the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. All others were, at best, God's servants; and nothing could increase that dignity for them or lift them above it. Of Christ alone it was true, that He took a bond-servant's form; and of Him alone could it be true, because He was in the form of God. In this nature He subsisted originally, as truly as He received a bondman's; both were real, equally real — the one intrinsic, the other that which He condescended to assume in infinite grace.

Nor was this all. When "found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." v. 8. This is another distinct step in His descent of grace to glorify God. First, it was humiliation *for Him* to become a servant and a man; next, being man, He humbled Himself as far as death in His obedience (the blessed converse of Adam's disobedience unto death). And that death was the extreme of human shame, besides its atoning character. Yet must we carefully bear in mind that it would be as impossible for a divine person to cease to be God, as for a man to become a divine person. But it was the joy and triumph of divine grace that He who was God, equally with the Father, when about to become a man, did not carry down the glory and power of the Godhead to confound man before Him, but rather emptied Himself; contrariwise perfection morally was seen in this. Thus He was thoroughly the dependent man, not once falling into self-reliance, but under all circumstances, and in the face of the utmost difficulties, the very fullest pattern and exhibition of One who waited upon God, who set the Lord always before Him, who never acted from Himself, but whose meat and drink it was to do the will of His Father in heaven; in a word, He became a perfect servant. This is what we have here.

Christ is said to have been in the form of God; that is, it was not in mere appearance, but it had that form, and not a creature's. The form of God means that He has His and no other form. He was then in that nature of being, and nothing else; He had no creature being whatever; He was simply and solely God the Son. He, subsisting in this condition, did not think it robbery to be equal with God. He was God; yet, in the place of man which He truly entered, He had, as was meet, the willingness to be nothing. He made Himself of no reputation. How admirable! How magnifying to God! He put in abeyance all His glory. It was not even in angelic majesty that He deigned to become a servant, but in the likeness of men. Here we have the form of a servant as well as the form of God, but that does not in anywise mean that He was not really both. In truth, as He was very God, so He became the veriest servant that God or man ever saw.

But we may go yet further. "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Mark that. There are two great stages in the advent and humiliation of the Son of God. The first is in respect of His divine nature or proper deity; He emptied Himself. He would not act on a ground which exempted Him from human obedience, when He takes the place of a servant here below. Indeed, we may say that He would act upon what God the Father was to Him, not upon what He the Son was to the Father. On the one hand, though He were a Son, He learned obedience through the things that He suffered. On the other, if He had not been a divine person — the Son no doubt — He would not have been the perfect man that He was. But He walks on through unheard-of shame, sorrow, and suffering, as one that sought only the will and glory of His Father in everything. He would choose nothing, not even in saving sinners or receiving a soul (John 6). He would act in nothing apart from the Father. He would have only those whom the Father draws. Whom the Father gives Him, whoever comes to Him, He welcomes them; He will in no wise cast any out, be they ever so bad. What a proof that He is thoroughly the servant, when He, the Saviour, absolutely puts aside all choice of those He will save! When acting as Lord with His apostles,

He tells us that He chose; but in the question of salvation, He virtually says, Here I am, a Saviour; and whoever is drawn to Me by the Father, that is enough for Me; whoever comes, I will save. No matter who or what it was, you have in the Lord Jesus this perfect subjection and self-abnegation, and this too in the only person that never had a will to sin, whose will cared not for its own way in anything. He was the only man that never used His own will; His will as man was unreservedly in subjection to God. But we find another thing: if He emptied Himself of His deity, when He took the form of a servant, when He does become a man, He humbles Himself and becomes obedient as far as death.

This is important because it shows, among others things, this also, that death was not the natural portion of our Lord as man, but that to which, when found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient. There was no death for Him merely as man, for death was the wages of sin, not of man as such without sin, still less of the Holy One of God. How could He come under death? In this was the contrast between Him and the first Adam. The first Adam became disobedient unto death; Christ, on the contrary, obeyed unto death. No other was competent so to lay down His life. Sinners had none to give; life was due to God, and they had no title to offer it. It would have been sin to have pretended to it. But in Christ all is reversed. His death in a world of sin is His glory — not only perfect grace, but the vindication of God in all His character. "I have power," He says, "to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." In the laying down of His life, He was accomplishing the glory of God. "Now is the Son of man glorified and God is glorified in him." So while God was pleased with and exalted in every step of the Lord Jesus Christ's life, yet the deepest moral glory of God shines out in His death. Never was nor could be such obedience before or in any other. He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

In this chapter it is not a question of putting away sin. It is ignorance of the mind of God to confine the death of Christ, even to that astonishing part of it, while fully admitting that there is not, nor ever will be, anything to compare with it. But the death of Christ, for instance, takes in the reconciliation of

all things, as well as the bringing us who believe unto God; for now that the world is fallen under vanity, without that death there could not be the righteous gathering up again out of the ruin that which is manifestly marred and spoiled by the power of Satan. Again, where without it was the perfect display of what God is? Where else the utmost extent of Christ's suffering and humiliation, and obedience in them? The truth, love, holiness, wisdom, and majesty of God were all to the fullest degree vindicated in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is not a single feature of God but what, though it expresses itself elsewhere in Christ, finds its richest and most complete answer in His death. Here it is the perfect servant, who would not stop short at any one thing, and this not merely in the truest love to us, but absolutely for the glory of God. It is in this point of view that His death is referred to here; and the Spirit of God adds (vv. 9, 10), "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at [in virtue of] the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly, and earthly, and infernal [ones]."

It is not merely a question of saints or of Israel, but "*every knee shall bow*," etc. This takes in angels and saints, and even those who are forever under the judgment of God; for to "*under the earth*" attaches the worst possible sense. Thus the infernal beings, the lost, come in here; the verse includes those that have rejected salvation, no less than those who confess the Saviour. It is the universal subjection of all to Christ. Jesus has won the title even as man. If unbelievers despised Him as man, as Son of man He will judge them. As man they must bow to Him. The lowly name that was His as Nazarene on the earth must be honored everywhere; God's glory is concerned in it. In the name of Jesus, or in virtue of His name, "*every knee shall bow*, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father." v. 11.

It is not, again, a question of His being Son (which of course He was from all eternity), but *Lord* also. We know that the spirit of this is true for the believer now. Every soul that is now born of God bows his knee in virtue of the name of Jesus, and to Jesus. The Christian now confesses by the Holy Ghost that Jesus Christ is *Lord*; but this homage will be made good to an incom-

parably larger extent by and by. But then it will be too late for salvation. It is now received by faith which finds blessedness and eternal life in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Neither is there any man that confesses Him to be the Lord by the Holy Ghost but a saved person. But there will be more than this by and by. When the day of grace is past and God is not merely gathering out an elect body, the Church, but putting down all opposing authority, then the name of Jesus will be throughout the universe owned even by those who do it by compulsion, and who by that very acknowledgment confess their own eternal misery.

In Ephesians 1:10 we are told of God's purpose for the dispensation of the fullness of times to "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth." There is not a word, it has often been remarked, about things under the earth, because there it is not a question of universal compulsory acknowledgment of Christ even by the devils and the lost, but very simply of all things being put under the headship of Christ. Neither lost men nor devils will ever stand in any such relation to Christ. He will surely judge them both. In Ephesians it is Christ viewed as the head of the whole creation of God, all things heavenly and earthly being summed up under His administration. Besides that, He is the head of the Church, which consequently shares His place of exaltation over all things heavenly and earthly, as being the bride of the true and last Adam. "He has made Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Christ fills all in all; but the Church is that which fills up the mystic, glorified man, just as Eve was necessary to the completeness of God's thoughts as to the first Adam.

The Church is the bride, the Lamb's wife. This mystery is great and largely treated in Ephesians; but it is not the subject of our epistle, where the aim is practical, enforced from One who came down from infinite glory and made Himself nothing, and who now is exalted and made Lord of all, so that every creature must bow. This is put before the Philippians as the most powerful of motives and weightiest of examples for self-abnegation, in love, to God's glory.

As a whole, we have seen that the state of the Philippian saints was good and healthy. It was not with them as with the Galatians, over whose speedy lapse into error — and what error it was! — the Apostle had to marvel and mourn. And as in doctrine, so in practice, what a change for the worse! Their love, once excessive one might say, was turned into bitterness and contempt, as the sweetest thing in nature, if soured, becomes the sourest of all. "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you that ye might affect them." Gal. 4:13-17. "But," adds the Apostle, with cutting severity, "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and *not only when I am present with you.*"

What a refreshing contrast was the condition of the Philipians! It was not only that their love was true and fervent, proving their fellowship with the gospel and their hearty sympathy with those engaged in its labors and sufferings; but their faithfulness shone out yet more when the Apostle was *not* in their midst. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now *much more in my absence.* . . ." What reserve in his tone to the one, and what opening of affections, heartily expressed, to the other! And no wonder. In Galatia, Christ was shaded under nature; religion it might be, but unsubject to God, aye, and unloving too, in spite of vain talk about love. In Philippi, Christ was increasingly the object; love was in true and wholesome exercise; and obedience grew firmly, because liberty and responsibility were happily realized, even the more in the absence of the Apostle and without his immediate help.

Accordingly he exhorts them thus: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both the willing and the working of [according to] his good pleasure." In Ephesians 2, the saints are viewed as seated

together in heavenly places in Christ; they are regarded here as working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. How can we put these two things together? With perfect ease, if we are simply subject to the Word of God.

If you try to make out that there is only one meaning of salvation in the New Testament, you are in a difficulty indeed; and you will find that there is no possibility of making the passages square. In fact, nothing is more certain and easy to ascertain, than that salvation in the New Testament is more frequently spoken of as a process incomplete as yet, a thing not finished, than as a completed end. It is not then a question of taking away something, but of getting a further idea. Take Romans 13:11, 12, for instance. There we find salvation spoken of as not yet arrived. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." From the context we find that it is connected with "the day" being at hand; so the salvation spoken of there is evidently a thing that we have not actually got, no doubt, coming nearer and nearer every day, but only ours in fact when the day is come. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." Salvation here, therefore, is manifestly future.

In the first epistle to the Corinthians (chaps. 1, 5, 9, 10), the same thing appears, though it be not so marked in expression. Take Hebrews again as a very plain instance. It is said there (chap. 7:25) that Jesus is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." The passage plainly is limited to believers. It is a saving of those that are in living relationship to God. Christ is looked at as a priest, and He is a priest only for God's people — believers. It would, therefore, be an illegitimate use of the verse to apply it to the salvation of sinners as such. Again, in chapter 9, "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." There cannot be the shadow of a doubt that there the Spirit speaks of salvation (salvation of bodies, and not merely of souls) as a thing only effectuated when Christ in person appears to us, when He receives us to Himself in and to His own glory.

But without going through all similar statements in other epistles, let me refer to the first epistle of Peter. It appears to me



that, with the exception of a single phrase in 1 Peter 1:9, salvation is always regarded as a thing not yet accomplished, and only indeed accomplished in the redemption of the body. That one phrase is: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of [your] souls." Now soul salvation will not be more complete for believers after Christ comes than now when they believe and are being carried through the wilderness; it is an already enjoyed blessing as regards the resting place of faith. But, with that exception, salvation in Peter applies to the deliverance that crowns the close of all the difficulties we may encounter in the passage through the desert-world, as well as to the present guardian care of our God who brings us safely through. It is a salvation only completed at the appearing of Jesus. (See chap. 1:5; 2:2, "*grow unto salvation*" in the critical text; and 4:18.)

This too I believe to be the meaning of "salvation" in the epistle to the Philippians; and that it is so will appear still more clearly when we come to chapter 3, where our Lord is spoken of as a "Saviour," even when He comes to transform the body. "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change," etc. The real meaning is, We look for the Lord Jesus Christ *as* Saviour, who will change our body of humiliation, that it should be conformed to His body of glory. There is the character of the salvation; it is a question not of the soul merely, but of our bodies. If we accept this thought as a true one and as the real scope of salvation throughout the context, interpreting the language here by the general object that the Holy Ghost has in view, the meaning of our verse 12 becomes plain: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." It is as if the Apostle said, *I* am no longer with you to warn, exhort, and stir you up when your courage is flagging — you are now thrown entirely upon *God*. You have got the ordinary helps of bishops and deacons, but there is no present apostolic care to look to.

No doubt the Apostle's absence was an immense loss. But God is able to turn any loss into gain, and this was the gain for them, that they were more consciously in dependence on the resources of God Himself. When the Apostle was there, they could go to him with whatever question arose; they might seek

counsel direct from him. Now his departure leads them to wait upon God Himself for guidance. The effect on the spiritual would be to make them feel the need of being more prayerful and more circumspect than ever. "As ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. I am not there to watch over you and to give you my counsel and help in difficulties, and emergencies, and dangers. You have to do with a mighty, subtle, active foe. Hence you have not to look to the hills, but to God, and to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

If the Apostle was not there, but in prison far away, God, he says, is there. It is God who worketh in you. That would give solemnity of feeling, but it would also infuse confidence. There would be fear and trembling in their hearts, feeling that it is a bitter, painful thing to compromise God in any way by want of jealous self-judgment in their walk — fear and trembling because of the seriousness of the conflict. They had to do with Satan in his efforts against them. But on the other hand, God was with them, working in them. It was not the idea of anxiety and dread lest they should break down and be lost, but because of the struggle in which they were engaged with the enemy, without the presence of an apostle to render them his invaluable succor.

But now he turns to those things in which they might be to blame and certainly about which they had to be on their guard. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings [or reasonings]: that ye may be blameless and harmless [simple, or sincere], irreproachable children of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." He calls them to that which would be manifestly a blameless walk and spirit in the eyes of the crooked and perverse round about them. But beside this, he looks for that which would direct in them, and show men clearly the way to be delivered from their wretchedness and sin; lights in the world, "holding forth the word of life"; and this with the motive to their affections, "that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, nor labored in vain."

But now he puts another consideration before them. What if he, Paul, should be called to die in the career of the gospel? Up to this point he had been communicating his mind and feelings to them with the thought that he was going to live; he had stated his own conviction that God meant him to continue a little longer here below for the good of the Church. But he suggests the supposition of his death. Granting that he might suffer unto death, what then? "But if also I be poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." To him it was the very reverse of a pain or trouble, the thought of being thus a libation upon what he sweetly calls the sacrifice and service of their faith. Nay, more, he calls on them to share his feelings. "For the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me." Thus the Apostle triumphs, turning not only his imprisonment into a question of joy, but also the anticipation, were it God's will, of his laying down his life in the work. He is even congratulating them upon the joyful news. How mighty and unselfish is the power of faith! He calls upon them that there should be this perfect reciprocity of joy through faith, that they might take it as a personal honor, and feel a common interest in his joy, as much as if it were for themselves. This is just what love does produce. As the Apostle identified himself with them, so they, in their measure, would identify themselves with him. May the Lord grant us to know it better through His grace.

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state." What a beautiful sample of the same self-denying love which the Apostle had pointed out in Christ and was seeking to form in the hearts of the Philippians! We know what Timothy was to the Apostle, but though to lose him, especially then, might be the greatest privation to himself, still he says, "I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you."

Divine love thinks of the good of others, and grace had wrought this in the Apostle. It was to furnish nothing of its own. He desired to know their state that his own heart might be comforted. Is not this the mind which was also in Christ Jesus? The imprisoned Apostle sent Timotheus from himself to them in the hope of getting good tidings of these saints that

were so dear to his heart. "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state" — no one with such genuine affection and care, not merely for me, but for you. "For all seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son the father, he hath served with me in the gospel." There was at once what was the common bond. The love of Christ filled both and made them both serve. They were doing the same thing. There was mutual confidence for the same reason; for Christ and stumblingblocks are incompatible. "Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly."

What then does he add? He could not come as yet himself; he was delaying Timothy till the result of his trial should be known, that the Philippians might have the latest intelligence about that which he was sure would be near to their hearts. But would he leave them without a word meanwhile? Far from it. He says, "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor." We see how love delights to share all things with others. He chooses terms which would link Epaphroditus with himself — "my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow-soldier." There was everything that could clothe him with honor and endear him to the saints, "but your messenger and he that ministered to my wants." He had all these insignia of honor in the cause of Christ. Nothing can be sweeter than this unfolding of affection; but it could only be, because the state of the Philippians had been thoroughly sound with God. We see nothing of this when he writes to the Galatians or Corinthians. So far from being sound in state, they were not even sound in the faith. The Galatians, we know, were letting slip justification; the consequence is, there is not an epistle so reserved and distant, as we may see in the marked absence of personal salutation. He wrote to them as a duty, as an urgent service springing from his love that desired their deliverance; but he had no kind of liberty in letting out his affections in the way we find here. God Himself led him to act thus differently.

"For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was

sick, night unto death; but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." I cannot conceive a more admirable picture of divine affections flowing out without hindrance to these saints. He descants upon what Timothy was to him, whom he hoped to send to them, and now upon Epaphroditus who had come from them as their messenger. His heart glows, and he opened out all his feelings about this link between himself and them. "He longed after you all and was full of heaviness," not because he was sick himself or was nigh unto death, but "because that ye had heard that he had been sick."

Such was the heart of Epaphroditus; such was Paul's to see and record it. Both were desirous that they should be relieved, by knowing how the Lord had shown Himself on their behalf. "But God had mercy on him, and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. See how the Apostle loves to trace the goodness of God, not merely toward the person who was the immediate object of God's dealings, but toward himself also. Scripture nowhere intimates such a thing in the mind of God as looking coldly upon the sickness or death of His children. Too often this is the case with us, as if it did not much matter, or it were a point of spirituality to be like a stone.

There is such a thing as the Spirit of God identifying Himself with human affections, as well as with divine ones. We find divine affections in chapter 1, and human affections here in chapter 2. The Holy Spirit has been pleased not only to bring down divine affections, so to speak, and put them into us, but also to animate the human affections of the saints. Christ Himself had them in His heart, for He was truly man. And now the Spirit of God gives another and higher value to these affections in the saints of God. This is as plain as it is important. The Holy Ghost mingles Himself, so to speak, with all. "I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful." The Apostle does not say, And that I may rejoice too. There is no unreality, nothing but transparent truthfulness here, as well as the most blessed love. It is "that ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful." He did feel the pang of parting with Epa-

phroditus, but he could rejoice that such a help went to them, because they would rejoice; and he himself would be the less sorrowful. It was his loss, but assuredly it would be their gain.

"Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation." Remark how careful he is to commend his fellow laborer to the esteem of the saints. Epaphroditus does not seem to have been a man of much outward mark. But men highly gifted ought to be tenacious on behalf of those of lesser gift. Certainly in the case of the Apostle, instead of being jealous as to others, there is the greatest desire to keep up their value in the eyes of the saints. "Hold such in reputation." Others might have feared for Epaphroditus or others like him, lest they might be puffed up. "Receive him," he says, "with all gladness, and hold such in reputation; because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me." We do not find any great account of what he had done in preaching or teaching; but there was the earnest, unselfish service of love in this blessed man of God, and that was enough for the Apostle Paul and ought to be also for God's children.

The Lord grant that we may be thus quick to discern and thus hearty in our appreciation of what is of Christ in others, whoever they may be, cultivating not so much keenness of eye for that which is painful and inconsistent in the saints, as steady desire for whatever brings Christ before the soul, whatever gives the ring of true metal, whatever bears the stamp of the Spirit of God.

### CHAPTER III

The Apostle had touched on various sources of joy to himself and the saints he was addressing. It was with joy he made supplication for them all (chap. 1:4). It was with joy, and ever new joy, that he beheld his very bonds giving a fresh impulse to the preaching of Christ (chap. 1:18). So too he is assured of his continuance with them all for their progress and joy of faith, that their boasting might abound in Christ through him (chap. 1:25). Next, he called on them to fulfill his joy (chap. 2:2), not merely by the proof of their love to him, but by cultivating unity of mind and mutual love according to Christ, who, though the highest, made Himself the lowest in grace, and is now exalted to the pinnacle of glory. "Yea, and if I be offered (or, poured forth) on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me." Chap. 2:17, 18. So, again, the Apostle sends away his companion and solace, Epaphroditus, when recovered, to the Philippians, who were uneasy at the tidings of his dangerous sickness, "that when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be less sorrowful." Chap. 2:28.

But there is a joy independent of all passing circumstances, and deeper than all others, because it is nearer to, yea, it is the one spring of all joy; it is to this the Apostle now calls them. "Finally [or, for the rest], *my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.*" It is of the deepest moment that we, that all saints, should heed the call. It is due to Him, in whom we are exhorted to rejoice, that we should bear a true testimony in this respect. I say not a testimony worthy of Him, for none is, save that which God the Father has borne and bears, and that which the Holy Ghost renders in word and deed. Still, great as our shortcoming is, the Holy Ghost is in us to give a divine appreciation of the Lord. May we not then dishonor Him by gloomy thoughts, by unbelieving feelings, by ways that betoken fear, doubt, dissatisfaction, yearning after creature pleasure in one form or another; but may we be enabled by faith, heartily,

simply, alone or with others, in public and in private, to "rejoice in the Lord."

It was thus with Paul and Silas when the foundation of the assembly at Philippi was laid at midnight in the prison, and the jailor and his house were gathered among the first fruits (Acts 16:25-34). Long labors had intervened, many years of reproach and suffering. The heart of the Apostle fresh as ever, though a prisoner at Rome, calls on the saints to "rejoice in the Lord." So he had taught when with them; so he had already urged in this letter, though now he presses it with greater distinctness as to its ground and spring. "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." It was no trouble to him, for he loved them too well to mind it. It was safe for them, for Satan threatened otherwise. Joy in the Lord is the truest safeguard against the religious snares of the enemy. Where the truth is known, the grand thing is to have the affections kept on the right object, and withal in happy liberty. This is secured by rejoicing in the Lord, which supposes the heart at rest in His grace, and Himself known and beloved, the most attractive and precious object before us. Put Him at a distance, wrap Him in clouds and darkness, think of Him mainly as the inflexible Judge about to be revealed in flaming fire taking vengeance, mix all this up with your own associations and relationships to Him, and with your experience; and is it any wonder that, under such conditions, peace is unknown, and eternal life a question unsolved and insoluble till the day of death or judgment? In such a state "rejoice in the Lord" has no tangible place, no practical application, not even a distinct meaning; and the soul is exposed, but for divine mercy which by other means may hinder all, to sink lower and lower into the dregs and deceptions of Judaizers.

Hence, says the Apostle, "beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." v. 2. There is not only a warning to take heed, but accumulated and bitter scorn of these high-minded men. For, rejecting grace and not submitting to the righteousness of God, they were restlessly prowling about, themselves unclean, whatever their pretensions; their work mischievous, their boasted privileges not only null but despicable in the extreme. There were "the dogs" now, not Gentiles even,



still less Christians, as such, but the Judaizers. Evil workmen were they, and not the circumcision, which they affected literally or in principle — they were but “the concision.” “For *we*,” the Apostle says with emphasis, “are the circumcision (whatever we might have been in the flesh, Jews or Gentiles — it mattered not), who worship God in the Spirit, [or, according to the best MSS, ‘who worship by God’s Spirit’], and boast in Christ Jesus, and trust not in flesh.” v. 3.

It is a mistake to imagine that these adversaries of God’s work advocated a return to mere Judaism. Such there were elsewhere, as in Hebrews, but they are treated as apostates. The class here in view consists rather of persons who professed Christianity, but sought to blend the law along with it, a system of evil which, far from being rare, is the commonest thing nowadays. Do you not hear of a fresh recourse to the cross, and fresh sprinkling of the blood to restore the soul? Are there not souls who take the place of God’s children and Church, and yet confess themselves miserable sinners, crying for mercy — sheep of His pasture, yet tied and bound with the chain of their sins? Does not this return to Jewish experience, under tutors and governors, ignore Christianity and annul redemption and the Spirit of adoption? Are there not notions still of holy places and holy castes, holy feast days and fast days, and administration of sacraments among those baptized into Christ’s death? The Word of God is read, Christ is more or less preached, but these unquestionable Jewish elements are mingled with what is Christian. Hence human forms of prayer, ordinances, etc., take the place of God’s Spirit as the power of worship; law-fulfilling (though by Christ) is openly boasted as the door into heaven, and our only title of righteousness; and thus to be risen with Christ, to be not in flesh but in Spirit, is supposed to be a fanatical dream, instead of the only condition which the Holy Ghost now recognizes as properly Christian.

Next, in verses 4-6, the Apostle briefly exposes the entire baselessness of their claims in comparison of his own, if flesh availed in divine things. “Though *I* [again speaking emphatically] have trust in flesh also; if another think to trust in flesh, I more: in circumcision of eight days, of the race of Israel, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, per-

secuting the Church; as to righteousness that is in the law, blameless." Thus, on grounds of the best earthly stock, due honor to ancient and divine ordinances, a high rank acquired in the school of tradition, an utter repudiation and hatred of new light in religion, and a life blameless according to the law, who could stand as firmly as Paul? "But," adds he, "what things were gain to me, these I counted loss on account of Christ. But so then I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, on account of whom I suffered the loss of all, and count them to be dung [refuse], that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having my righteousness, which [is] of law, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God on my faith; to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if by any means I may arrive at the resurrection which is from out of the dead." vv. 7-11.

What was it, then, which had wrought so deep, so permanent, and, as we know from Acts 9, so sudden a change? What poured contempt on every natural, on every religious advantage from his birth up to the day when, with credentials from the high priest, he neared Damascus? It was the heavenly vision which arrested him on the way; it was Christ seen in glory, yet one with those whom his infatuated zeal was persecuting to prison and death. "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." Sure that He whose light shone on him brighter than the noonday sun was no other than the Lord God of Israel, the astonished Saul of Tarsus learns from His own mouth that He was the Crucified, whose disciples he would have up to this conscientiously exterminated. No wonder, then, that the converted, delivered Israelite, obedient to the heavenly vision, judges all things by this new and divine light. A new creature in Christ, for him old things had passed away, all things were become new; all things were of that God who reconciled to Himself by Jesus Christ. Hence the things that were to him gains, he counted loss on account of Christ; yea, all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge, as he says with such affection, "of Christ Jesus my Lord," on whose account he not only suffered the loss of all at first, but now to the last continued to count

them refuse that he might gain Christ (or, have Him for gain). What was his boasted righteousness now? His one thought was to be found in Christ, *not* having any such righteousness of his own, which must be legal, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God grounded on faith; to know Christ and the power of His resurrection (not even Christ on this side the grave), and the fellowship of His sufferings. His eye was on Christ above, and if he added aught of Christ here, it was not in His deeds of power, nor His recognition of the ancient sheepfold, but in the moral glory of His sufferings. It was in that which proved the total alienation of man from God in his good things, not in his bad alone; in his religion, and not merely in his lusts and passions. His own experience was the witness of it. His confidence in the tradition of the elders, in Israel, in the law even, was ruin and rebellion to God as He now reveals Himself in Him who died and rose and ascended. Nothing, consequently, has the trust of his soul or value in his eyes, but Christ; and even if he could have anything else that looked good, he would know none but Christ, and have nothing but Christ the sufferer, risen and in heaven, as his portion. Hence conformity to His death was now a jewel to be won, rather than an evil to be shunned. Let the path be ever so dangerous, come what might, all would be welcome, "if by any means I may arrive at the resurrection from out of the dead." v. 11. This last is not an expression of fear or failure, but of a heart which so prized the blessing of being thus with Christ as to mind no suffering that might intervene.

Whatever the pathway might be, the Apostle intimated, as we have seen, that he must be there. Such was the value of the resurrection of the just in his eyes. Like the Israelite in Psalm 84 on his way to Jerusalem, the ways were in his heart. He loved the way of Jesus, of His sufferings, of the cross, and not merely the glory at the end. "Not as though I had already attained [literally, received, i.e., the prize], or am already perfected." It was not a question merely of the soul's happiness. "I would to God," he had said to king Agrippa, "that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." Who of all men was so happy as the Apostle Paul? Yet he warns us against supposing

that he had yet obtained what he desired. There is no such thing as getting the prize till we are in the resurrection from among the dead. But he adds, "I follow after [or pursue], if also I may lay hold, for that also I am laid hold on by Christ." v. 12. He keeps his eye fixed upon Christ all the way through as well as at last. This was the strength of his triumphing over all the difficulties that lay between. No present experience, no actual joy detains his heart from God's end. The Apostle wanted to gain possession of Christ by and by; but also Christ had possession of himself already.

"Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold [whatever others might dream]; but one thing, forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue . . . ." v. 13. The Apostle does not mean that one ought to overlook, or that he did overlook his past sins and failures. On the contrary, it is most evil to forget what Christ has suffered for our sakes, and also the manifold ways wherein we have dishonored God. This will not at all interfere with settled peace — rather the reverse. A man can rejoice so much the more in the Lord if he fully judge his failure. It is the tendency of a conscience not thoroughly happy to desire to escape from thinking of anything in which we have consciously turned aside to the grief of the Holy Ghost. It is a right thing to search ourselves through and through; it is right to ask God to search and try us, and to lead us in the way everlasting. Confidence in grace, so far from weakening the sense of our own shortcomings or covering over our failure, is the very spring that enables us to see and deal with the reality of things in the presence of God. Thus the Apostle speaks of "forgetting the things behind," not with reference to his failure, but rather to his points of progress, the steps or stages in which he had made advance in the knowledge of Christ. Instead of dwelling upon any attainment, as if it were something to be thought of (like the Pharisee comparing himself with his neighbor), here we have this blessed man forgetting all that might have fed self-complacency or been creditable to himself. His back was on the ground traversed. "Stretching out to the things before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." v. 14. This can only be in the resurrection state. Till then he was content

to run. This was his one business. It was to live Christ, because Christ was his object.

But now follows another thing which we need to bear in mind. We find different conditions and not at all the same degree of progress made by the children of God. What then is the grand principle to guide us? Let us suppose a company of believers gathered together, all of the same mind, every one of them brought up to think exactly alike, from baptism with water to the coming and kingdom of Christ, their minds made up and consenting even about points of detail. Would this satisfy the heart? Would it give a just witness to the ways of God toward His children? I dare not think so. It is sweet where God brings souls by exercise of spiritual judgment under the guidance of the Holy Ghost to feel alike. But where sameness is the result of dinning one doctrine into people's heads, and by rules and regulations which squeeze minds into monotony, can anything be more miserable? The Apostle lays down the only divine rule for dealing with these cases. We have to do with a state of things where there exist all varieties of attainments. In heaven we shall know as we are known; but the question is how to bear ourselves about these things here. It is a natural desire that all should grow and rise to a certain height of the stature of Christ. But are we not apt to confound the point desired with our own idea of it? to desire that people should have *our* mind. This we have to guard against, and the true corrective is given here.

"As many, therefore, as be perfect, let us be thus minded." v. 15. He speaks of himself and others also, as being "perfect"; but there is no contradiction of what went before. When he had, in verse 12, disclaimed as yet the reception of the prize and being perfected, he meant that he was not yet out of the conflict in a resurrection condition. But when he here exhorts "as many as be perfect," he means those who are of full age in the faith, thoroughly grounded in the Christian position, entering into it by faith and spiritual intelligence. It means a Christian who is not a babe, but full grown; not, of course, a Christian who has thoroughly finished his course, for this is in resurrection, but one who has become a man in Christ. He shall not have grown up into the full likeness of Christ till He comes and

transforms us like to His glory. But there is such a thing even here as growing into the full knowledge of the mind of God, and it is through having got Christ in glory before us now the personal object of our souls. But suppose there are others among the children of God still in difficulty and doubt, what then? Are we to make them adopt our feelings and judgment about things? Certainly not. It would be a positive loss, unless it were by the power of the Holy Ghost leading the saints into a fuller apprehension of Christ.

The reference here is not to such matters of faith or practice as preclude difference. We ought not to have a hesitation where the glory of the Lord is concerned. There can be no question about sin. It is taken for granted in the Bible that no difference of mind could be tolerated where Christ is at stake. All saints instinctively see the enormity of bringing in moral evil to the table of the Lord. The Holy Ghost counts upon our resenting affronts to God. Allegiance to Him commands the conscience and rouses the heart of every saint of God if properly stated. These things God reckons upon. Nor is it only the wise and intelligent who are able to judge things of the sort, but the babes also. The only cases that ought to be brought before the Church as such are those which every believer is able to judge. It is quite a mistake to drag habitually everything before the assembly; but where things come out of an evidently immoral or of a heretical character, there any saint rejects the poison, one as much as another. It is not the babes who have difficulties or who give trouble, as a general rule. How often clever, intelligent people do the mischief, while the simple-minded would feel the evil of such things at once! Here, on the contrary, the matters spoken of are such as some saints might feel, and not others. There might be practical or doctrinal questions, as the particular manner in which children ought to be brought up, or the style of living, furniture or house. There one must be content to point out the holy principles of God, not to assume hastily that our own measure is such that we ought to attempt to make every other adjust his children or house by it. God is jealous that He should have the forming of His saints. A good example is precious, and we cannot be too careful as to the ways we allow. But having said this, it is for the children of

God to examine themselves conscientiously by His Word. In such things we must be patient and look for the action of God by His own truth on the souls of His saints.

We may suggest what we can of the truth of God to influence the heart; but there is no absolute rule to be laid down by any on points like these. One has often known persons who began strongly with a certain idea which governed them, and with which they zealously sought to govern others. How long does it stand? In the very thing on which they have prided themselves, they are apt to break down. It is Christ whom God makes the standard of everything. All else fails. Why push so strongly and in haste? "If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." There is no need then to be anxious. "Nevertheless whereto we have attained, walk by the same." v. 16. So far as we are occupied with Christ together and see His mind or will, it is of great importance that we should walk together.

But the Apostle goes farther; he refers to his own example and points out as a beacon the walk of some, once owned as brethren. Need I say that it was no fleshly thing in the Apostle thus to speak of himself? As a mere man, a person would be ashamed to talk about himself; it would be but a piece of vanity. The Apostle was so completely raised above the thoughts of men, he so thoroughly realized the power of God in Christ, that it just illustrated the energy of the Spirit in him. He was led of the Holy Ghost to speak thus. He calls upon them therefore to be imitators together of him, and to mark those that walk so as ye have us for an example (v. 17). "For many walk of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly and glory in their shame, who mind earthly things." v. 18, 19. We are not even told whether these men had been put away from the Church of God. They are characterized as enemies of the cross of Christ, and yet they may not have been formally without. If so, what a deplorable state of things before the eyes of the Apostle! persons probably not guilty of such flagrant wickedness as to require excision, and yet the source of the deepest sorrow to the Apostle. They were going on carelessly, indifferently. How awful

to view some within perhaps with less hope than others put away for flagrant sin! We all know how truly this is verified in the present state of Christendom. How many bear the name of Christ who by their ways show there is not the slightest breath of divine life in them! Professing to know God, in works they deny Him.

This drew out the tears of the Apostle even in the midst of his joy; but he turns it to a practical profit, calling on the saints to take heed. Let us watch against the beginnings of self-indulgence or allowing earthliness. "For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven"; our real association is with Him who is there. Whatever we might have been as citizens of the earth, it is at an end now and forever. We belong to Christ on high. It is not merely that we are going there, but we belong to heaven now. Our commonwealth, our citizenship, is there; and therefore from thence also "we look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour." He has decided to have us in entire fellowship with the home to which we pertain, because it is His. He is coming from heaven; and, when He does, "he will change our body of humiliation so as to be conformed to the body of his glory according to the working whereby he is able also to subdue all things to himself." Then we shall be manifested what we now are in call, life, and desire. We are now heavenly, and then we shall be declared and proved to be so. We belong to heaven even while we are upon the earth; then it will be made plain that we had no real link with the earth, but with Christ above.

The Lord grant that we may seek to bring this into everything with which we have to do, into the heart, the home, and the whole life. He has made us His friends, and may we be enabled, with a purged conscience and with a heart rejoicing in Himself, to look onward to that blessed moment when we shall prove Him true to all the hopes He has given us.



## CHAPTER IV

The main truth which was in the mind of the Apostle, and which the Lord was using him to lay upon the hearts of the Philippian saints, was now clearly expressed and enforced. The rest of the epistle, this last chapter, consists rather in the connected exhortations and practical use to which it was turned for present profit. Indeed it may have been noticed that, throughout, this epistle is eminently practical. Every whit of it has an immediate and important bearing upon the communion and walk of the saint of God. Of course in a general way there is no truth which is not meant to deal with the heart and walk in some way or another; yet I do not hesitate to say that this epistle is remarkable for nothing more than for its being the personal experience of the Apostle himself seeking to raise the experience of the saints at Philippi to the same measure, yea, according to the standard of Christ Himself. Accordingly, having shown us Christ fully, both as an example here below and as a motive in heaven (the earthly example being specially given in chapter 2, and the heavenly motive in chapter 3) now comes the practical object to which it is applied.

"Therefore," says he, "my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and my crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." It is evident that the spiritual affections of the Apostle were deeply moved. Brotherly love was flowing out powerfully, and not the less because he had been occupied with Christ, with the deep feeling of what Christ had been and is, and with the joyous anticipation of that which the saints are destined to be when they see Him coming from heaven in the fullness of His grace and power, changing even their very bodies of humiliation that they may be fashioned like unto His glorious body. Salvation being only then and there complete, he bids them "so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." And so much the more because it would

appear that there were some among them who were at variance one with another.

Things were working there which separated in the way of affection, or at least, in the service of the Lord, those who had been engaged in it from earliest days. And this may be found where there is nothing at work of a scandalous character, because the very ardor and zeal of the servant of God may easily carry him, if there be not adequate occupation with Christ, into danger; even service ensnares and imperils where it becomes an object instead of Christ. It would appear that such was the case with some active saints at Philippi. "I beseech Euodia, and I beseech Syntyche that they be of the same mind in the Lord; yea, I entreat thee also true yoke-fellow, help them [i.e., these women just named], seeing that they contended with me in the gospel, with Clement also and the rest of my fellow-laborers whose names are in the book of life."

Now, it is plain that there are two things which the Apostle here presses. First is the great importance of having the same mind not only in the Lord but also in the work of the Lord. The danger is of having some aim or way of our own in that holy occupation. The Lord is assuredly jealous over those whom He employs, and He works continually to preserve each servant in the immediate sense of his own responsibility to Himself. No one need fear that this would interfere with mutual respect or hinder the outflow of divine affection linking together the various servants of God. Man would think so because he must judge from his own selfish heart. It is the flesh that seeks its own things; while the Spirit of Christ, whatever may be its holy judgment of evil, is never selfish. It is the grossest mistake to suppose that where the heart is brought to estimate all things according to God, you bring in an element of division between brethren; not this, but the indulgence of flesh opens the door to strife and schism.

Supposing a child of God who has gone astray, what is it that separates him from his brethren? Nothing but the evil that has been indulged in. The Holy Ghost acts in the man's soul; now he feels, confesses, and separates from that which is fleshly. At once the balance is restored and you are more

united in love with that erring soul than, perhaps, you ever were before. Up to that time there may have been much which hindered fellowship. The irritability of spirit, the censoriousness, the vanity, the self-confidence broke out too often in the very service and worship of God — all this had previously produced many an anxious feeling for spiritual minds, and this just because there was real love to his soul. The consequence was so far that which separated, not in outward walk, but in fellowship of heart; whereas the moment there was the genuine action of the Holy Spirit of God — sin having actually, perhaps, broken out because of nature not being judged and the separation having become complete — the moment the evil is dealt with even in the man's spirit, and he owns frankly that he has sinned against the Lord, your heart is knit to him and you have a confidence in him which may never have existed before.

The notion is false, therefore, that serious judgment of evil is what divides between brethren. On the contrary, it is evil (not separation from it) which sows discord or makes separation necessary among brethren. Gracious separation from evil knits the hearts of those who are true with the Lord. It is holiness in fact. Apart from sin there is the enjoyment of God Himself and of His good and acceptable will. In this world holiness implies the judgment of evil and separation from it in heart and practice, as far as we are concerned. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is that which gathers the children of God on the ground that all their evil has been judged there and separated from them forever by His death.

No matter how you look at it, in every case it is evil that divides, and it is the judgment of evil that unites hearts, in an evil world according to God. Any unity of the children of God would be a positive sin against Him if it were not founded upon separation from evil. Having referred to the broad and fundamental principle of separation from evil, which will be found to be eminently practical, we may turn now to see its application to the matter before us.

At Philippi there rose before the Apostle's heart godly persons there at work; but work is not always Christ and may be division. The tendency is not uncommon to disparage what

another is found doing, and to exalt ourselves in what we know to be our own line of things. This tends to break up happy fellowship of heart; and, where there is anything of a spiritual atmosphere, these things are deeply felt. Among the Corinthians this was but a small thing compared with the grosser evils that were active in their midst; but at Philippi where the state was comparatively healthy and blessed, where also the spirit of obedience reigned as we know, the lack of harmony from whatever cause it may have sprung becomes of importance; and the variance therefore of these two sisters is pressed home by the Spirit of God, but not before ample comfort had been ministered, which would encourage their hearts to look to Christ.

How tender, and withal how personal, is the appeal to each of these Christian women! "I exhort Euodia and I exhort Syntyche that they be of the same mind in the Lord." He begins with the Lord, not with the service, though the variance may have grown up in its course. He calls on them one by one (for one might hear if not the other) to be of the same mind in the Lord. Depend upon it that, where the Lord occupies us, differences soon dwindle. Having each the eye fixed upon the Lord, there is found a common object of attraction, and thus the enemy's hope of producing alienation is defeated at once.

He adds a request also to his true yokefellow. I suppose the reference is to Epaphroditus, of whom he had spoken with ardent affection in chapter 2. "Yoke" in Scripture is a badge of union or of subjection, as the case may be, in service. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 6, the believer is told not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Many narrow that scripture to the natural relationship of marriage. But though the marriage tie between believers and unbelievers is evidently not according to God, yet I doubt that there is any particular allusion to it in that scripture. The object there of the Spirit of God is to take up the commixture of the believer with the unbeliever in the service and worship of God. The Apostle brings forward the temple of God as well as individual matters, and shows that we are not to have fellowship corporately any more than individually with unbelievers. I only refer to it now because

it is often put aside from the consciences of the children of God through the mistaken habit of referring it to marriage; whereas, it is plain on the face of it that the direction the Holy Ghost gives would not strictly apply to marriage.

Bad as it is for a believer to marry an unbeliever, God does not even then say, Come out from the relationship; leave your wife; part from your husband. Apply it to its legitimate object (that is, fellowship with unbelievers in the things of God), and then you have a maxim of deep and urgent importance. I am not to unite with the world in any one thing that concerns the service and worship of God. This is the true meaning of being *unequally yoked*. "Come out and be separate" is then the special word that applies to any such unholy alliance.

This makes all plain, when men ask if we are not to do anything for the world. If there is sorrow and want, am I not to help sufferers? Surely if there be a peculiar duty to the household of faith, I am also bound to do good unto all men; but there is no yoking together with others outside Christ in this, and no communion. The worldly man gives because he is generous, or feels for the need of the person, or is expected to give. The child of God does it because it is the will of God. The one acts on the ground of nature, the other in faith. Even in the most ordinary necessary acts, as eating and drinking, I may and ought to do it all to God's glory.

Suppose a man drowning, or a house on fire, there is a claim of course on any man; but to use the help that a servant of God might render on such occasions, as a reason for joining the world with the saint in the service of God, is to deceive or be deceived — it may be, willingly. I have no hesitation in saying that to put an unbeliever on the ground of joining in prayers and hymns and taking the Lord's supper, to sanction his joining with you in such services, is as far as you can to damage if not destroy his soul. No believer would act thus without an object other than Christ. What the Holy Ghost seeks for the unregenerate soul is to convince him of his ruin; but, if yoked with you in God's work or temple, you are cheating him (or he you) into a false ground. You thus far

treat him as an acceptable worshiper and make him think that he is doing God's service as truly, though perhaps not so well, as yourself. This is as contrary to holiness as to love, equally opposed to God's glory and man's good.

Were these godly, energetic women now apart in spirit? He not only exhorts *each* separately, but asks Epaphroditus as I suppose, the true yokefellow of the Apostle, to help them. For these women had shared the Apostle's sufferings in the gospel when it entered Philippi. It is not, "*And entreat thee,*" as in the English version or the commonly received text; nor is it, "*Yea and,*" etc. The best authorities omit "*and*" altogether, which was a corruption of "*yea.*" For the Apostle is continuing in verse 3 the same thought as in verse 2, and is urging his dear and true yokefellow at Philippi to succor those previously named women (not others, as the ordinary rendering might convey), "*the which*" (*haitines*) or "*since they*" contended with him in the gospel. It is not said that they preached; there is no reference to public service here.

There is a great difference between preaching the gospel and sharing the contentions of the gospel. Even a man might have labored diligently and never have preached in his life; and there might be some striving every day in the gospel as diligently, or more so even, than those who preached it every day. There is beautiful choice in the language of the Holy Ghost. We all ought to know that the New Testament puts the Christian woman in the place of exceeding blessedness, removing every thought that would give her an inferior place in Christ; but it puts her also at the same time in the background, wherever it is a case of public action. Here officially, so to speak, the man is called to be uncovered, the woman to be veiled. She is thus, as it were, put behind the man; whereas, when you speak of our privileges in Christ, there is neither male nor female. It is of importance to see where there is no difference and where there is.

The first epistle to the Corinthians is most plain that the head of the woman is the man; and as Christ is the glory of the man, so the man is the glory of the woman. We find there the administrative difference between the man and the woman. When you come to the heavenly privileges we have in Christ,

all these distinctions disappear. There is no public action that I know in the world or in the Church allotted to the Christian woman. As to private dealing with souls, the case is different. In their father's house, the four daughters of Philip may have prophesied. They were evidently highly gifted women; for it is not said of them that they labored in the gospel, but that they prophesied—one of the highest forms of gift from Christ. At the same time the Holy Spirit, who tells us that a woman might and did prophesy as a fact, instructs us that it is forbidden to a woman to speak in the Church where prophesying properly had its course. But there a woman was forbidden to speak, not even allowed to ask a question, much less to give an answer. Yet as to the private scene, at home, even with an Apollos, a woman might fitly act; that is, if she acted under and with her husband. Priscilla might be of more spiritual weight than Aquilla; but this very thing would lead her to be the more careful to take an unobtrusive lowly place. The yokefellow of the Apostle seems to have been somewhat timid of helping these women. The Apostle, accordingly, entreats him also as he had exhorted him. "Help those women in that they contended with me in the gospel." They were not putting themselves forward in an unseemly public sort, but they had shared the early trials of the gospel with the Apostle Paul.

At Corinth the women assumed much, and the Apostle manifests his sense of it by the reproachful demand, if the Word of God came out from them, or if it came to them only (1 Cor. 14:36). Thus, and not only thus, had they quite slipped aside from that which prevailed in the churches of the saints. No doubt they reasoned that, if women had gifts, why should they not exercise them in all places? But He who gives the gift is alone entitled to say when, how, and by whom it is to be exercised. At Philippi where there was an obedient spirit, there might have been too great reluctance to meddle with these otherwise estimable women who were estranged from each other. The Apostle bids Epaphroditus to render his help. "Help them who are such as contended with me in the gospel." He gives them special praise. They strove for and with him in the work. He joins himself with those persons whom his yokefellow may have been rather afraid of.

He joins them also with Clement and other fellow laborers. What tenderness in touching the case! He encourages the fellowship in the service of the gospel not only with faithful men, but with women whose faithfulness was not forgotten because there were painful hindrances just now.

But now, leaving the question of variance among them, he returns to his topic of exceeding joy. He had been encouraging one who had his sympathy and confidence to help these women. He now calls on all to rejoice in the Lord alway. If he touched on these sorrows, let them not suppose that he wanted to dampen their joy; on the contrary, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice." This, let me repeat, is an important thing practically. It is a total mistake when we allow difficulties or differences among the saints of God to hinder our perfect delight in the Lord. Do we desire the glory of Christ among those who are His? I must always maintain that glory in my own soul if I am to be a witness to Christ among others. Is the Lord's love affected or at least enfeebled by these passing circumstances? Is His glory less bright because some shades of self have betrayed themselves over the brow of His saints? Surely not. Thus he turns to the keynote of the epistle, that joy in the Lord of which he had been speaking as his own portion now, and by-and-by in chapters 1 and 2, and that to which they were called in chapter 3 and again in chapter 4.

Is it not a sorrow to think where Christians have got to in this respect — how this answer of heart to Christ has faded away from the hearts of so many; how even the assembling together to remember Christ in His supper does not always awaken fullness of joy, but often an uneasy feeling and most painful shrinking back from His table as if it concealed some hidden danger, some lion in the way, instead of Jesus my Saviour and Lord, who loved me and gave Himself for me? What humiliation of spirit ought to be ours as we think of all that thus dishonors the name of Christ. But does God intend that even this should hinder our joy? In no wise. Let the ruined state of God's people be in Israel or in the Church, those who felt it most invariably enjoyed the greatest nearness to Himself and most of all entered into His own joy,



while at the same time they mourned the more over the shortcomings of those bearing His name. The two things go together. Show me hearts which, though godly, are not happy; hearts over-occupied with the circumstances of the Church, constantly talking about the evil and low condition here and there; and you will never show me souls that deeply enjoy the Lord and His grace; whereas in the person who really enjoys the Lord and has the consciousness of what Christ and the Church of God are in Christ and should be in the power of the Spirit now, who therefore best estimates what Christendom has become, there will be the two things harmonized — the heart resting upon Christ, dwelling in His love; while, at the same time, man's weakness and Satan's malice in ruining all can be rightly judged. These two things we have to cultivate.

"Let your moderation [mildness] be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful [anxious] about nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." vv. 5, 6. To prayer is added thanksgiving, because the Lord is entitled to it. The heart should not forget what a God we are making our requests to. In the confidence of this let us thank Him, even when we are spreading our wants before Him. But he had said before this, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." Supposing there is someone who has seen us a little off our balance in standing upon our rights, real or imaginary, something which contradicted the gentleness of Christ, ought we not to feel humbled, and take an early opportunity to wipe off what may have given a false impression to that man's soul? God would have our readiness to yield, not resist, known, and this not sometimes or to some persons, but to all men. By moderation the Apostle means that spirit of meekness which can only be where the will is not allowed to work actively for that which we may desire. And what a reason why we need not be anxious to assert a claim, even when we are right! "The Lord is at hand." Where there is the happy feeling in the soul that one is doing that which pleases God, there is generally the readiness of trust in the Lord that puts aside anxiety and leaves all in His hands. Besides, He is coming soon.

He will bring out everything that is according to Himself. He will bless every desire wherever there may have been a true testimony for Himself. He will give effect to it in that day. "The Lord is at hand." He is not come yet, but you can go to Him now and lay all your requests before Him, assured that He is near, that He is coming. And what is the result? "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." v. 7. When the heart commits to God all that would be a burden to it, the consequence is that His peace, the peace in which He moves and lives, guards us from the entrance of all that would harass. The sources of care are cast into the Lord's lap, and the peace of God Himself, which surpasses every understanding, becomes our protection.

Wherever we have grace to spread before God what would have tried us (had we thought of it and kept it before our spirits), there is infallibly His own peace as the answer of God to it. The affections are at rest, and the working of the mind that would otherwise forecast evil. Hence all is calmed down by the peace of God Himself.

Peace is viewed in more ways than one in Scripture. The peace of God here has nothing to do with the purging of conscience. It is a question of keeping heart and mind. Where conscience is yet burdened, there is but one way of finding peace. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Sins were there, and how was the moral nature and majesty of God to be vindicated about sin? Far from God, in all our ways at war with God, how could we have peace with Him? The only door, through which we, poor enemies, pass out of such a condition into peace with God, is by believing the testimony He has given of His Son. But this is "*peace with God*," not "*the peace of God*." If I endeavor to get comfort for my conscience by spreading out my need before God, there is never full rest of conscience. The only means entitled to give rest to the sin-stricken is faith in God's assurance that sins are blotted out by the blood, and sin has been perfectly judged in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. "By him all that believe are justified." If one's own state mingles for a single moment with this, it is a delusion on

such a ground to reckon upon peace with God. But if I believe on Christ and what He has done, I can boldly say that Christ deserved that even my sins should be forgiven. Therefore I can add, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." The value is not in the faith, but in our Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot get the blessing without believing, but it is an answer to the worth of Christ in God's sight.

But, besides this settled peace which we have through the work of Christ, there is the practical peace of God, which has nothing to do with the remission of sins (though assuming it as a settled thing for a foundation), but of the circumstances through which the believer passes day by day. Paul was in prison, when he wrote to the Philippians, unable to build up the churches or to labor in the gospel. He might have been cast down in spirit, but he never was more happy in his life. How is this? Because, instead of being anxious and troubled about the danger of the Church and the afflictions of individuals, about souls that were perishing, he looked at them in connection with God, instead of looking at them as connected with himself. If God was in peace about these things, why should not he too be? Thus the simple resource of spreading out all before God and casting it off himself into the bosom of his Father had for its effect that God's peace kept his heart and mind. Nor was it special to the Apostle. He puts it before the saints as that which ought to be equally their portion. It is evident there is no room left for anxiety. God would not have His children burdened or troubled about circumstances. Till the Lord come, this is the blessed source of relief. God is here working, and His peace keeps our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, where we give Him His honor and our trust.

But even this is not all, for there are other things which claim or test us besides anxieties and cares. There is our ordinary Christian life; what can strengthen us in it? Here is the word, the apostolic counsel (v. 8), "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true." There may not be many bright spots, but there are some; am I not to think of them? This is what I am called upon to do—to be quick of discernment, seeing not what is bad but what is good. I may have to judge what is evil, but what God looks for is that the spirit should be occupied

with the good. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest [rather, venerable, or noble], whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Our consciences can answer whether these are the things we are most apt to think about. If we are swift to hear not of these things but all that is painful, while slow to hear whatever is of God, the consequence is, instead of having the God of peace as our companion, we have ourselves and others hindered by evil thoughts and communications. For that which the soul wants is only what is good. We are not exhorted to be learned in the iniquity of world or church, but "wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil." God has given those whom He qualifies to judge evil—spiritual men who can take it up as a duty to Him, and with sorrow and love toward those concerned—but these God employs, among other purposes, for the sake of keeping His saints in general out of the need of such tasks. It is happy that we are not all called upon to search and pry into evil, seeing and hearing its details; but that, while the Lord may graciously interfere to guard us from being mistaken, our proper wisdom is growing in what is according to God.

Why, ordinarily, should a simple child of God occupy himself, for instance, with a bad book or a false teacher? It is enough for us if we have good ground to know that a thing is mischievous, and all we have then to do is to avoid it. If, on the contrary, I know of something good, it has a claim on love and respect; it is not only for myself but for others. We are never right if we shut up our hearts from the sympathy of Christ with the members of His body or the workings of His Spirit here below. If there were even a poor Roman Catholic priest, who knew and brought out the truth of God more plainly than others, let us not say, "can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" but, come and see if any thing come with adequate evidence of having God's stamp upon it. Let us not limit Him who is above all circumstances; even if there be that which is most distressing, let us thank God that His gracious power refuses to be bound by any limits of man. It is of great impor-

tance that we should have largeness of heart to think of all that is good, wherever it may be.

"Those things which ye both learned, and received, and heard, and saw in me, do." v. 9. If ever there was a man with a large heart, it was the Apostle Paul. And yet no servant of God had a deeper view of evil, and a more intense abhorrence of it. Here the Spirit directs them by what they had seen in his own spirit and ways. It is not matter of doctrine but his practical life. This goes farther than supplanting anxiety by the safeguard of God's own peace; it is the practical power of positive good. What is the effect upon the heart? "The God of peace shall be with you." "The God of peace" is far more than even "the peace of God." It is Himself the source; it is the enjoyment of His own blessed presence in this way. There is *relief* in having the "peace of God" as the guard of our hearts and minds; there is *power* in having "the God of peace" with us. Want we anything? Impossible. "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at the last your care of me flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." They had shown love to the Apostle Paul at a previous time, as we find afterward (v. 15) where he contrasts "the beginning of the gospel" with "at the last."

The Philippians had been favored of God and had shown their love to the Apostle in their early days. He had not forgotten it. It would appear that he rarely received from the saints of God, perhaps because he met with but few even among them that could have been trusted. It would have wrought evil by reason of their want of spiritual feeling. They might have thought something of it, or the gospel might have suffered in their minds or with others through it. But the Philippians were sufficiently simple and spiritual, and we know what delicate feelings the power of the Spirit can produce. They, accordingly, had the privilege of ministering to his wants. This the Apostle alludes to, and with exceeding sweetness of feeling on his part. He felt that the word, "at the last," might be construed into a kind of reproach, as if they had forgotten him for a long time. He hastens to add therefore, "wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity" (v. 10). On the other hand, he guards them against supposing

he wanted more from them. "Not that I speak in respect of want" (v. 11).

In the corrupt heart of man, the very expression of gratitude may be an oblique hint that further favors would not be amiss. The Apostle cuts off all thought of this by the words, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." This is not indigenious to human nature. Even Paul may not always have known it; he had *learned* it. "I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound." v. 12. His experience had known betimes what it was to be in absolute want, as he knew what it was to have want of nothing. "Everywhere and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer. I can do all things through him [the true reading] who strengtheneth me." A wonderful thing for a man in prison to say, one who apparently was in most abject circumstances, and in no small danger—unable to do anything, men would say. But faith speaks according to God, and the man who can do nothing in the judgment of his fellows, is the very one who could say he had strength for all things in Him that strengthened him (v. 13).

When the world comes into collision with a Christian, when it criminales, robs, and imprisons him, when the Christian is evidently as happy as before, the world cannot but feel it has come into contact with a power that is entirely above its own. Whenever it is not so, we have failed. What the world should find in us, under all circumstances, is the expression of Christ and His strength. It is not merely when the trial comes that we should go to the Lord and spread out our failure before Him; we ought to be with Him before it. If we wait for the trial, we shall not stand. In our Lord's case you will find that where there was victory in the power of faith, our Lord went through the suffering before it came. He went through it with God, yet no one felt trial as He. This therefore does not make the suffering less, but the contrary.

Take the garden of Gethsemane as an instance. What saint but our Lord ever sweated drops of blood in the prospect of death? Hence others may have entered into it in some little degree; and the measure has always been the power of the Spirit of God giving them to feel what is contrary to God in

this world; for in this world whoever loves most suffers most. But here was one who had suffered much, who knew rejection as few men ever knew it, who had found the world's enmity as it is the lot of not many to prove. And yet this man, under these circumstances, says he has strength for all things through Him who strengthened him. Be assured that a blessed strengthener is near every one who leans upon Him. Paul does not speak here of apostolic privilege, but as a saint, a ground on which he can link himself with us, that we may learn to walk in the same path which he was treading himself. Having freely owned their love (in vv. 14-16), having shown that it was because he desired fruit that might abound to their account in verse 17, he closes all with this: "I have all and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God." v. 18. And, marvelous to say, he is a giver himself. At any rate he counts upon One who would give everything that was needed in full supply. "But *my God* shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." v. 19.

What language from a man who had just been in want, and whose want had been supplied by these saints! Now he turns round and says, "*My God shall supply all your need.*" The God whose love and care and resources he had proved through all his Christian career—"my God," he says, "shall supply all your need according to his riches *in glory* by Christ Jesus." He is supplying the saints now according to all the wealth of His resources even in glory in Christ. There the shadow of a want will be unknown, but God is acting according to the same riches now. Therefore the Apostle breaks forth in praise to God forthwith. "Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever, Amen." v. 20.

There is a notable change in phraseology. He says first, "My God shall supply all your need," and afterward, "our God and Father." When it is a question of experimental knowledge and confidence, he could not say "*our God*," because they might not have the same measure of acquaintance with His love as he had who had proved and learned so profoundly and variedly what God is. But when he ascribes unto the ages of ages glory

to God the Father, he cannot but join them fully with himself. "Now unto our God and Father be glory," etc. His heart goes out to all believers. "Salute every saint in Christ Jesus." v. 21. What a joy for those in Philippi to hear of brethren in unexpected quarters! The Apostle had gone to Rome to be tried before Caesar. Now, it appears, there were those of the imperial household who sent special salutation through the Apostle to the Philippians. "The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." vv. 21, 22.

The heart gets wonderful relief in seeing the things that are lovely and of good report, and calculated to give our hearts confidence in the darkest day. Whatever the great trial of the present time (and never were there subtler snares or more imminent danger), there is no less grace in God, no less blessing to men in view of all. Let us not forget the word, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." v. 4. This epistle was not written as looking back upon the day of Pentecost, but for a time when the Apostle was cut off from helping the churches, and when the saints were warned that they must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. But the trial is yet sharper for the spirit, if not bodily, for those who would walk with the Lord now. Let us not doubt His love, but be sure that God is above all circumstances. If God has cast our lot in these days, let us not doubt His goodness, but know that we may have as deep and even deeper joy because the joy is less in saints, less in circumstances, and more exclusively in Christ.

It was sin that hindered the Church's blessedness in these ways and others; but since we have been called when and where we are now, may we eschew the unbelieving wish to exchange for any other. It is a question very simply of faith in God. He loves us and He cares for us. May our hearts answer to the perfections of His grace. While feeling the sorrow of the saints, of the gospel, of the Church more deeply, as all affects the glory of God, let us leave room in our hearts to count upon a known, tried God, who ever will be God, superior to all difficulties, foes, snares, and sorrows. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." v. 23.



Lectures on

# Colossians

by William Kelly

## THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS

W. K. Translation

I (1) Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, and Timothy the brother, (2) to the saints in Colosse and faithful brethren in Christ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

(3) We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, continually praying for you, (4) having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which ye have unto all the saints, (5) on account of the hope that is laid up for you in the heavens, of which ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, (6) which is come unto you, even as in all the world it is producing fruit and growing, even as also among you, from the day that ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth; (7) even as ye learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-bondman, who is for you a faithful servant of Christ, (8) that has also manifested to us your love in [the] Spirit.

(9) On this account we also, from the day that we heard, do not cease praying for you, and asking that ye might be filled with the full knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; (10) to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit, and increasing in the full knowledge of God, (11) in all power empowered according to the might of his glory, unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy; (12) giving thanks to the Father that qualified us for sharing the inheritance of the saints in light; (13) who delivered us from the authority of darkness and translated [us] into the kingdom of the Son of his love: (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; (15) who is [the] image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation; (16) for by him was created the universe, the things in the heavens and those on the earth, the seen and the unseen, whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities. The universe has been created through him and for him. (17) He is before all things, and the universe in him subsist-

eth. (18) And he is the head of the body, the assembly; who is [the] beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that he might be in all things pre-eminent: (19) for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell; (20) and by him to reconcile the universe unto him, having made peace by the blood of his cross—by him, whether the things on the earth or those in the heavens. (21) And you [who] once were alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, (22) yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death to present you holy, and unblamable, and irreproachable before him, (23) if indeed ye abide in the faith grounded and firm, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel (which ye heard, that was preached in the whole creation under the heaven), of which I, Paul, became servant; (24) who now rejoice in sufferings for you, and fill up what is wanting\* of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body, which is the assembly, (25) of which I became servant, according to the stewardship of God that was given me for you, to complete the word of God, (26) the mystery that was hidden from ages and from generations, but now hath been manifested to his saints; (27) to whom God wished to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: (28) whom we preach, admonishing every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ, (29) whereunto also I toil in conflict according to his working that worketh in me in power.

II (1) For I wish you to know how great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in flesh; (2) that their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding unto full knowledge of the mystery of God, (3) in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (4) And this I say that no one may beguile you by persuasive speech. (5) For if even in the flesh I am absent, yet I am with you in the spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. (6) As therefore ye received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, in him walk, (7) rooted and built up in him, and confirmed in the faith,

\*Or, "the deficiency."

even as ye were taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

(8) See that there shall be no one that leadeth you a prey through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ. (9) For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; (10) and ye are complete in him who is the head of all principality and authority; (11) in whom also ye were circumcised with circumcision not wrought by hand, in the putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of the Christ; (12) buried with him in baptism, in which ye were also raised with [him] through faith in the working of God that raised him out of the dead. (13) And you, being dead in offenses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he quickened you together with him, having forgiven us all the offenses, (14) having blotted out the handwriting in ordinances [that was] against us, which was contrary to us; and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to his cross; (15) having stripped the principalities and the authorities, he made show openly, triumphing over them in it. (16) Let none therefore judge you in eating and in drinking, or in respect of feast or new moon or sabbaths, (17) which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [is] of Christ. (18) Let no one defraud you of your prize, doing his will in humility and worship of the angels, intruding into things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh, (19) and not holding fast the head, from whom all the body, ministered to and knit together by the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God.

(20) If ye died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as alive in [the] world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances? (21) Handle not, neither taste, nor even touch (22) (which are all for destruction in the using), according to the injunctions and trainings of men; (23) which have a reputation indeed of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and unsparingness of [the] body, not in any honor to satisfying of the flesh.

III (1) If therefore ye were raised with Christ, seek the things above, where the Christ is seated on [the] right hand of God. (2) Set your mind on the things above, not on those on

the earth. (3) For ye died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God. (4) When the Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory. (5) Put to death therefore your members that [are] on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; (6) on account of which things cometh the wrath of God [upon the sons of disobedience]: (7) in which ye also once walked when ye lived in these things.

(8) But now do ye also put off the whole:\* wrath, anger, malice, blasphemy, vile language out of your mouth. (9) Lie not to one another, having put off the old man with his deeds, (10) and having put on the new that is renewed in full knowledge according to [the] image of him that created him; (11) where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, free, but Christ the whole,\*\* and in all.

(12) Put on therefore, as elect of God, holy [and] beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering; (13) forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any should have a complaint against any; even as also the Lord forgave you, so also [do] ye; (14) and in addition to all these, love, which is [the] bond of perfectness. (15) And let the peace of the Christ rule in your hearts, into which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful. (16) Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing each other with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, in grace singing in your hearts to God. (17) And everything, whatever ye do in word or in work, [do] all in [the] name of [the] Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him.

(18) Wives, be subject to the husbands, as was fitting in [the] Lord. (19) Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them. (20) Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in [the] Lord. (21) Fathers, do not irritate your children, that they be not discouraged. (22)

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\* "The whole" here (as "the universe" in chapter 1:16, 17) not very exactly represents *ta panta*, but in my opinion is better than "all."

\*\*See preceding note.

Bondmen, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in simplicity of heart fearing the Lord. (23) And whatever ye do, heartily work as to the Lord and not to men, (24) knowing that from [the] Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance: ye serve the Lord Christ. (25) For he that doeth wrongfully shall receive what he did wrongfully, and there is no respect of persons.

IV (1) Masters, justice and equity accord to your bondmen, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

(2) Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving; (3) praying at the same time also for us, that God may open to us a door of the word to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am also bound, (4) that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. (5) Walk in wisdom toward those without, buying up the time.\* (6) Let your speech be always in grace, seasoned with salt, to know how ye must answer each one.

(7) All my affairs shall Tychicus make known to you, the beloved brother and faithful servant in [the] Lord; (8) whom I sent unto you for this very thing, that he may know your concerns and comfort your hearts, (9) with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother who is of you. They shall make known all things here.

(10) Aristarchus, my fellow-captive, saluteth you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas, about whom ye received injunctions (if he come unto you, receive him), (11) and Jesus, that is called Justus; who are of the circumcision. These [are the] only fellow-workers for the kingdom of God who have been a comfort to me. (12) There saluteth you Epaphras, who [is] of you, a bondman of Jesus Christ, always striving for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all [the] will of God.\*\* (13) For I bear him witness that he hath much labor for you and those in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis. (14) There saluteth you Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas. (15) Salute the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the assembly in their house. (16) And when the letter

\*Or, "opportunity."

\*\*Or, "every will of God," everything that is such.

hath been read by you, cause that it be read also in the assembly of Laodiceans, and that ye also may read that from Laodicea. (17) And say to Archippus, See to the ministry which thou didst receive in [the] Lord that thou fulfill it. (18) The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace [be] with you.

## CHAPTER I

It is hardly possible for the most careless reader to overlook the kindred truth set forth in this epistle and in that to the Ephesians. Union with Christ, the Head of His body the Church, has a place here beyond all other scriptures; for though 1 Corinthians may present the same doctrine (chap. 12), it is evident that there is a question of the assembly of God on earth, in which the Holy Ghost is actively at work through the members, distributing to each as He will, much more than of the saints viewed in Christ above, as in Ephesians, or of Christ viewed in them below, as in Colossians.

Nevertheless, distinctions of great moment and full of interest characterize these two epistles, the chief of which lies in this, that, as in Ephesians we have the privileges of the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who filleth all in all, so in Colossians we have the glories of the Head, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. This difference, like others, was due, in the wisdom of the Spirit, to the moral condition of those addressed. In the former case the Apostle launches out into the counsels of God, who has blessed the saints with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; in the latter case there was a measure of departure into philosophy and Jewish traditions, not an abandonment of Christ, of course, but such an admixture of these foreign ingredients as threatened fatal results in the Apostle's eyes, unless their souls were brought back to Christ, and to Christ alone, in all the rights of His Person and work. Thus the epistle to the Colossians, in consequence of their state, does not admit of the vast scope and development of divine purposes and glory for the saints seen in and united to Christ; whereas in writing to the Ephesians there was then nothing in them to arrest or narrow the outgoing of the Apostle's heart, as the Spirit led him to apprehend with all the saints the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. Here it is largely a question of exhortation, of



recovering their souls, of grave warning. Hence the human element is more prominent here. Writing to the Ephesians the Apostle associates none with himself in the address; yet was Ephesus the capital of proconsular Asia and well known to his fellow laborers and associated by a thousand tender ties with himself and others. The assembly at Colosse as such was among those that had never seen his face in the flesh. This makes it the more marked when he joins Timothy with himself in their case.

"Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, and Timothy the brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse: grace to you and peace from God our Father." vv. 1, 2. For himself, he was not unauthorized, nor was his title human. He was an apostle, not of the Church, but of Christ Jesus by divine will; and Timothy stands with him simply as "the brother." Again, the assembly at Colosse is characterized not only as "saints and faithful," as the Ephesians were, but as "faithful brethren." It is evident that here again, while all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, this term "brethren" brings out their relations to one another, as the others suppose God's grace and their faith if not fidelity.\* His own apostolic place is named with quiet dignity and with evident appropriateness for all that follows.

It has been well observed that the Apostle quite omits anything answering to the magnificent introduction with which he begins his Ephesian epistle (chap. 1:3-14). There was a check on his spirit; he felt the danger that threatened the Colossians. How could he then at once break forth into an unhindered strain of blessing? The Holy Spirit is the Spirit

\*The omission of "and the Lord Jesus Christ" in the best texts is particularly to be noted; for the drift of the epistle is to give especial prominence to the glory of Christ. Some excellent copies which contain the words may have naturally fallen into this mistake; for the scribes would not without an effort abstain from the usual formula in these epistles. On the other hand, it is difficult to account for the absence of so familiar an ending in first-rate witnesses of various ages and countries, and for the express statement of early commentators that it was not found here, if the words be genuine.

of truth and deals with hearts and consciences. Still, if that high tone of worship could not find a place here with propriety, there is immediate thanksgiving. "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ always when praying for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and love which ye have toward all the saints, on account of the hope that is laid up for you in the heavens, of which ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel that is present with you, even as also in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing even as also among you, from the day when ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth: even as ye learnt from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-bondman, who is a servant of Christ, faithful for you, that also declared to us your love in the Spirit." vv. 7, 8.

The Apostle had heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus that was in the Ephesians, and their love toward all the saints, which drew out his heart in thanksgiving and prayer. He knew them personally and well, having labored with deep blessing in their midst; but it was sweet to hear of the working of the Spirit among them. So of the Colossians, though not known thus, he had similar tidings, for which he could thank God always in his prayers for them.

But is not the difference striking between the two as exemplified in his manner of presenting the hope? In Ephesians it is the hope of God's calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. What can be more profound or boundless? Here he could scarcely say less. Their hope was laid up, it was safe, it was "in the heavens," not (spite of philosophy or of ascetic ordinances) on the earth. Of all these they had to beware, whatever their looks and promises. Of their proper hope he would remind them, recalling them to the heavens where Christ is, the true and only deliverance from all the workings of mind in divine things and from earthly religiousness.

This heavenly hope, blessed as it is, was nothing new to them; they had heard it before in the word of the truth of the gospel. What the Apostle taught would not weaken or undermine, but confirm that which they had heard in the good news which converted them originally, or (as he here styles it, to

give it all possible weight in presence of their straining after novelties) "in the word of the truth of the gospel." It was not intellectual groping, but "the word" definitely sent to them, God's revelation; it was not dabbling in legal forms, but "the truth," the truth of the gospel. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The gospel came to them, yea, was there present with them, no more changing than He does who is its sum and substance. Real truth, even when new, never sets aside the old, but on the contrary supplies missing links, deepens the foundations and enlarges the sphere. Had their philosophy, had their novel restrictions (chap. 2) increased their sense of the value of the gospel? Had these things exalted Christ? There is no doubt what the effect of Paul's teaching would be either in general or in this epistle very especially.

Further, the gospel being thus the display of God's goodness in Christ, not the measure of human duty nor a system of religious shadows, its theater according to God's intentions is not a single land or family, but "all the world"; and its operation is not condemning and killing, but producing fruit and growing, even as among the saints at Colosse. Was there this fruit bearing, and expansion too, since they had taken up their newfangled notions and legal ways? The gospel is both productive of fruit and has propagative energy. This addition of its growth (*kai auxanomenon*) is lost to the common text, having been omitted in inferior copies. That it is genuine cannot be fairly questioned. Certainly both traits were known from the day they heard and really knew the grace of God in truth. And this gives the blessed Apostle opportunity, as was his wont, to strengthen the hands of one who was Christ's minister and faithful on their behalf, "Epaphras, our beloved fellow bondman," as he is here affectionately called. The speculative views, the Judaistic forms, had, no doubt, their exponents, who would seek to ingratiate themselves at a faithful laborer's expense. We can readily conceive that the word thus commending Epaphras was needed at Colosse.

In the last portion we saw how the Apostle could speak of the effects of the gospel from the day they had heard it and knew the grace of God in truth. Grace is not like the law. The

ten words are chiefly negative. The law, for the most part, deals with what is evil and condemns it; but the gospel reveals Christ as a quickening power, and a strengthening and fruit-producing power. Being a principle of life, it expands and grows as well as produces fruit, as the Apostle describes it, "and bringeth forth fruit [and increaseth] since the day ye heard it," etc.

But now he says, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it [heard of this living witness to the power of the gospel], do not cease to pray for you." This is a beautiful expression of the Apostle's love which, spite of fear which he justly entertained about the tendencies of these Colossian saints, still only drew him out in prayer for them the more. "And to desire (or ask) that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will." They had shown rather the reverse of this; they had proved a void in their hearts, which they had in vain sought by legal ordinances and philosophy to fill up. Nothing but an intelligent and growing acquaintance with Christ can satisfy the renewed heart. The very mercy that delivers a soul becomes a danger unless Christ Himself be the maintained habitual object. Alas! the freedom which the gospel brings may be used to take things easily, and, more or less, retain or gain the world; but where this is the case, it is seldom a soul possesses any large measure of spiritual enjoyment, and it is never accompanied by solid peace. The soul becomes thus unsettled and uncertain. These oscillations may go on for a certain time, until God carry on the work more deeply in the heart. The Colossians were in some such state; they had not steadily advanced to a fuller knowledge of God's will; consequently Satan found means to trouble them. They had seen the first precious display of grace; it was real but not deep; for knowing the grace of God in truth is not the same thing as being filled with the knowledge or full knowledge of His will.

The law never gives that in the least degree; it is a righteous interdict upon man's will. Thus there is only one of the commandments — I mean the law about the sabbath day — which has not distinctly this character. Negation never can form a Christian's ways. We want the bracing of the man morally to all that is good. How is this to be effected? As

there is in Christ the communication of life, so also from Him comes the filling with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The believer is not treated by God as a horse or a mule which have no understanding, but as an intelligent and loving being who is brought into fellowship with God. He would not be a delivered man if his own will ruled him; but this is the very reverse of being *filled* with the knowledge of God's will, and therefore it is that the Apostle prays for them that they may be.

In Ephesians, though we read in wonderful terms about God's will (chap. 1), the Apostle did not as here require to ask the knowledge of it for them. There was an apprehension of heart in them that did not need that the Apostle should thus pray for them. He does desire for them both a deeper knowledge of their standing, and a richer enjoyment of Christ within, that they might be filled with the fullness of God — "strengthened with might by his Spirit." But to be filled with the knowledge of His will, as we have it here, evidently has to do with practical walk, "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord." In other words, in the Colossians there is an important practical bearing upon the walk; it is more the forming of the child; it is the strengthening and guiding of one that can but feebly walk, to help it along. In Ephesians, it is the communication of the God and Father of Christ to His children, who are now no longer babes, but fullgrown men. Hence, there we have the family relations, feelings, estates, interests, responsibilities, and very fully. The Colossians had been misled by the thoughts of teachers who were themselves far astray. Though the saints there were earnest, still there was something that blinded their eyes. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." They must have been governed by their own thoughts, else they would surely have rejected these false notions. It is a simple truth, but very important to observe, that what is presented as God's will necessarily forms the mind, and consequently the walk, of a Christian man. If I am misled as to the mind or objects of God, the effect will be most fatal practically; and the more earnest, the farther one goes astray. But the Apostle had prayed for the Colossians, and still continued, "that they

might be filled with this full knowledge of him." I do not the least doubt that in this passage there is a contrast with the walk of one who, however well-disposed, is under law. The more the Christian knows about God's will, which is gracious as well as holy, happiness grows and strength too; whereas law works so as to produce misery and convince of utter weakness. No doubt, if there were a deep sense of the presence of God, it would make but little difference with whom we might be, worldly men or children of God. Of course there would be a difference in our bearing to them according to their relation to God or ignorance of Him; but as a fact, we are always deeply influenced by the company which we keep; we affect and are affected by those we are thrown with. Therefore, it is evident that when Christ was a revealed Person before the soul, and just in proportion as the believer realized his right relationship to Him, so would his walk be. If I know my place as bound to Him and Himself as my Head and Bridegroom, having Him as the object of my heart, it is clear a totally different walk will be the result. The measure and character of the walk among the children of God is formed by the measure of our acquaintance with Christ, where the flesh is sufficiently judged to enjoy it.

But mark again that all through, until we come a little farther down, the Apostle does not touch upon the matters in which they had been faulty. In the middle of chapter 2 he tells them plainly wherein they were to blame. This is very important for us to observe; because, if our aim be really the good and deliverance and help of souls, we should see what God's way is of meeting souls and enabling them to escape the snare. And this we best learn by observing and cleaving to the guidance of the Holy Ghost as shown us in such scriptures as these. It is a rebuke to one's own too frequent bearing toward others, when we think of the marvelous grace and the slowness of the Apostle in coming to what people call the point. I have no doubt there is much to learn in this; and so much was it the case, that from the beginning of this epistle we might almost think these Colossians were in a very delightful condition. The Apostle is most careful to approach gradually that which pained him and must pain them. He is sapping and

mining, as it were, to take the citadel; but it is slow work, though sure.

There is another expression here that is well worthy of our notice: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." It is not worthy of the gospel, neither is it worthy of our calling, etc. These are not the form of the exhortation here. The Ephesians were sufficiently clear of this evil influence and could be instructed freely in the calling of God to which they were called; and therefore he says there "that they might walk worthy of the vocation," etc. But he says to the Colossians, "worthy of the Lord." It would not be so easy for them to get rid of the effects of occupation with philosophy and ordinances. The Ephesians had been kept quite clear of this error, and therefore they are exhorted to walk worthy of what they knew to be their place.

As the Lord Jesus is pointed to here, so "unto all pleasing" is the measure; it is not as pleasing us or others, but pleasing Him. Now this is wholly different from the law, which just asked so much and no more. The ways of grace were to be unlimited, "worthy of the Lord unto *all* pleasing." Therefore he adds immediately, "being fruitful in *every* good work." It is all positive and not merely negative like the requirements of the law. "Increasing by the full knowledge of him" here appears to be the thought. It refers to the means of Christian growth. I think the "wisdom and spiritual understanding" means a perception of what is good and wise in God's sight, apart from its being His express command. I might do a thing simply because another wished it, and of course this is quite right where there is due authority. For instance, my father may bid me do such or such a thing, and I may do it without knowing why; but here it is my Father who at the same time shows me the importance of it. Thus "wisdom" sees the beauty and propriety of any given thing, and "spiritual understanding" takes the right application. One seizes the cause; the other is occupied with the effect. In this then the gospel differed from the law. Whether a person entered into the meaning of the law or not, he obeyed simply because God ordered. This does not rise to the nature of the Christian's obedience, which enjoys the unfolding of the mind of God in Christ, so

that one not only sees His authority, but also its admirably perfect character and its gracious effects. It is quite right that a subject, a servant, a minor, should learn to obey, if it were only for the sake of obedience. But this is not the Christian principle. The obedience of a Christian is not the blind leading the blind, nor is it the seeing leading the blind, but rather the seeing leading the seeing. But there is very much more in this. It is not merely that people are quickened and bear fruit; but, besides that, they grow either by or into a deeper knowledge of God Himself. That deepening acquaintance with God, which goes along with the knowledge of His will, is a very important thing in the path of obedience. One knows God better, one enters into His character better, one learns Himself intimately. Another thing which is of great importance is, that there is not only the growing knowledge, but the being strengthened with all might according to the power of His glory; for this is the idea—it is not “his glorious power,” but the power of His glory. It supposes that the glory of Christ has a most decided effect, as the way in which strength is formed or communicated.

If I look at Christ here on the earth, I see Him in weakness and shame and rejection, but in the deepest grace withal, and nowhere so much as on the cross; we cannot do without it, we would not if we could (indeed Christ everywhere is unspeakably precious and absolutely necessary for us); yet for the Christian the place of strength is to look at Christ risen and glorified. No doubt this thought of Christ as one down here in this world is what draws out the affections, even as the cross meets the need of the conscience; but neither gives strength in itself, neither is intended of God to give all that we want. Hence while those who know Christ at all will surely find in Him life and blessing, yet they are never strong where His earthly path is all that occupies their hearts. What then supplies our need as to this? Such should weigh what is said in 2 Corinthians 3: “We all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” This gives practical power. So here the question of power connects itself with His glory. If sympathy be in question, it is always connected with His life



down here; for instance, in Hebrews, though Christ is spoken of at the right hand of God, etc., yet it is as One who was once tempted in all points like us, sin excepted, and hence touched with a feeling of our infirmities. This is most comforting as to the power of sympathy. Eternal life and strength are two very different things. The only idea with many is following Christ as an example. Of course it is admirable; but what is to give power? I must be in relationship with God first, a possessor of eternal life, and then power is wanted. I am not in the position till I know redemption through the blood of Christ, and power is only found in Christ risen and glorified. The spring of power is not in looking at what He was down here, but having the consciousness of the glory that is in Him, the power of that filling my own heart, and making the certainty of being with Him. I shall thus not shrink from the rejection that was Christ's portion down here, being strengthened . . . "unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." It is an evil world that we are passing through; but we have this wonderful secret: we have the consciousness of better blessing we possess in Christ. Therefore, let me observe, it should be the very opposite of a man going through trial with his head bowed down. Let it be according to the power of His glory with joyfulness, "giving thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

This is a present meetness. Sharing the portion of the saints in light is a most wonderful favor; but the Apostle does not hesitate to predicate it of these Colossians whom he was going to rebuke with all solemnity in the next chapter. Still he says the Father has qualified us for sharing the portion of the saints in light. It is purposely put "in light" to show how absolute is the effect of God's work in Christ. It is not simply the inheritance, because that would not of itself present the idea of unsparing holiness, as light does. Again, the portion of the saints in light is not upon the earth or in the heavens merely, but in the light where God dwells as such. Wondrous place for us! Our Father *has* made us meet for *this*. The effect of law is always to put God at a distance. Therefore here the Father is put forward.

There are many persons who only look at God as the Creator and the Judge. Although they admit life in Christ, yet are they not at home with the Father. They make of Christ what the Papists make of the virgin Mary. It is all false. This was what made the necessity of bringing the Father especially forward. In Ephesians it was not necessary to do so; they were intelligent in the truth. Here, although the great object is to make Christ, the unqualified glory of Christ, to be that which shuts out ordinances, etc., yet the Apostle brings in the Father, showing that the Father was acting in His love. The combination of perfect love and our being made meet for light now is a wonderful truth. As to the light, the Christian is always in the light; but he may not always walk according to it. A Christian, if he sins, sins in the light; and this is what gives it such a daring character. He may be in a dark state himself practically; still, he is always in the light. And it is precisely this which makes a Christian's sin to be so very serious. He is doing it in the presence of perfect love and in the presence of perfect light. There is therefore no excuse for it.

This blessing depends upon two things: first, upon the effect of the blood of Christ in completely atoning for our sins; and next, upon the fact that we have the life of Christ communicated to us, which life is capable of communing with God in the light. Both these gifts of grace are absolutely true of every Christian. He has the blood of Christ cleansing him as much as he ever can have, and he has life in Christ communicated to his soul as much as ever can be. That which follows in after experience as regards this (for I speak not of service, etc., but of growth in intelligence) is simply having a deeper estimate of what Christ's blood has done and what He Himself is, who has shown us such infinite favor and done so much for us.

Our Father has done more, as the Apostle shows further how we are thus qualified: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness." It is not merely a question of wicked works, but of the power of darkness; how could we, then, be delivered from Satan? He says they were delivered and, more than that, "translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love." It is all perfectly done. The deliverance from the enemy

of God is complete, and so is the translation into the kingdom of the Son of His love. "In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." "Through his blood" has been inserted in the vulgar text and followed in our version, but it really belongs to Ephesians. I do not doubt the copyists put it in here because it was there. There is greater fullness in Ephesians than in Colossians. Hence the former shows us how we can be so blessed, spite of our sins entering into the statement of the account there. But here it is just summing up the blessing, "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God."

The object evidently is not so much to dwell upon the work of Christ as to bring out His personal glory. Christ is never said to be the likeness of the invisible God, because it might imply that He was not really God. This would be fatally false; for He *is* God (and without it God's glory and redemption are vain), but yet He is the image of the invisible God, because He is the only Person of the Godhead that has declared Him (see John 1:18). The Holy Ghost does not manifest God. He does manifest His power, but not Himself; but Christ is "the image of the invisible God." He has presented God in full perfection; He is the truth objectively. He who has seen Him has seen the Father. He was always the Word, the One who made God manifest. The word "image," as has been remarked, is continually used in Scripture for representation. Such is the first thought. Christ is the image of the invisible God.

The next glory is that He is the first-born of all creation. This seems obviously contrasted with His being the image of the invisible God. Christ as truly became a man as He was and is God. He was *made* flesh. He is never, nor could be, said to be made God. He partook of flesh and blood in time, but from everlasting He is God. Having shown that He was the image of the invisible God, the Apostle then speaks of Him as the first-born of all creation. How could this be? Adam was the prototype; we might have thought *he* was first. But here, as elsewhere (Psa. 89:28), the title of first-born is taken in the sense of dignity rather than of mere priority in time.

Adam was the first man, but was not nor could be the first-

born. How could Christ, so late in His birth here below, be said to be the first-born? The truth is, if Christ became a man and entered the ranks of creation,\*\* He could not be anything else. He is the Son and Heir. Just so we are now by grace said to be the Church "of the firstborn," although there were saints before the Church. It is a question of rank, not of date. Christ is truly first-born of all creation; He never took the creature place until He became a man, and then must needs be the first-born. Even if He had been the last-born literally, He must still be the first-born; for it has nothing to do with the epoch of His advent, but with His intrinsic dignity. All others were but the children of the fallen man Adam, and could in no sense be the first-born. He was as truly man as they, but with a wholly peculiar glory. What makes it most manifest is, that He is here declared to be first-born of all creation, "*for by Him were all things created.*" This makes the ground perfectly plain. He was first-born of all creation, because He who entered the sphere of human creaturehood was the Creator, and therefore must necessarily be the first-born. This is the plain and sure meaning of the passage, in the strongest way confirming the deity of Christ, instead of weakening it in the least, as some have conceived through strange misunderstanding. Hence these have changed the rendering to "born before all creation." It is unnatural to take it so, spite of some ancients and moderns. But indeed there is no need for a change. God's Word is wiser than men. There is no scripture which assumes His dignity more than this.

First, then, He is said to be the image of the invisible God. Then we have His human place, in which He was first-born; because, being God, it could not be otherwise. In Hebrews, He is said to be constituted heir of all things, as the Son of God. But here it is said, "all things were created in virtue of him"; it is not merely "by" Him, but in virtue of His own divine power.

"For by him were all things created that are in heaven and

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\*\*\*Christ is not, and I think could not, be called (*KTISMA*); for this would be derogatory to the Creator. He is called the first-born of all creation (*PASES KTISEOS*) and also the beginning of the creation (*KTISEOS*) of God.

that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created by him and for him." All this reaches to things of which we know little, or even beyond our ken. As we had before what was in virtue of His power, so now it is by Him, because Christ was both one who acted in His own divine right, and also one who acted instrumentally for God the Father's glory. All things were created by Him. The word "created" is different; in one case it is a past action, but in the other it is the present effect of what is past, the first expressing the power that made to exist, the second rather the present result of it. "And he is before all things," etc. Not merely was He before all things, but before all (God only, of course, excepted). Nor was it merely that all things were, but they were created for His pleasure. "And by [or, in virtue of] him all things consist." In virtue of Him gives a clearer and more intimate idea. The object here is to take away all vagueness in exalting Christ.

But, again, "He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." We shall find a reason for this in what follows. It is interesting to see that there are two very distinct first-borns: first-born of all creation, *because* He is the Creator; and first-born from the dead, as a new, plain and weighty matter of fact. Thus Christ is not only the Head of creation as man, but He is first-born from the dead as risen. It is in connection with this that He is Head of the Church. He was not in this relationship upon earth; He was not so simply as taking humanity. Incarnation is an entirely distinct truth from His headship of the Church, which involves the further truth of union. It is evident that His headship of the body, the Church, is introduced by His being risen from the dead, and by the place given to Him in heaven.

But Colossians does not at once begin with the heavenly place of Christ. Ephesians presents Him plainly as risen and seated as Head. Here it is more general, and does not speak of His being in heaven; He is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." Many confound union with incarnation; but union is

not His taking flesh and blood here below, but our being made members of His body, now that He is risen and glorified. There could have been no union with Him until death and resurrection, and the Holy Ghost was given to unite us with Him in that risen condition. Then and not before we have the body, the assembly. He had a human body, of course; but the mystical body is formed by the Holy Ghost sent down after He rose from the dead. The one, as woman-born, was connected with the earth; the other is with heaven.

With the pre-eminence of Christ in all things, two great considerations stand before us. First, all fullness was pleased to dwell in Him. It was not a partial nor ever so full manifestation of God; this might have been in any man; but here all fullness was pleased in Him to dwell. This is the truth of Christ's Person, the glory of the incarnate Lord. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, the kingdom of God is come unto you." "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." Yet we know it was always by the power of the Holy Ghost that everything was done and said. So truly was all the fullness pleased to dwell in Him.

We observed in an earlier verse that it was because of His being a divine person that He could be said to be the first-born of all creation. It was founded upon the fact that He was God who created all and sustains all. But here there is more. In Him all fullness was pleased to dwell. It was not alone a question of acting, but of dwelling, whether He acted or not. Thus it is a very precise and rich statement indeed.

But again (v. 20), there is another unfolding of the truth which sets forth His glory, another reason assigned for His indisputable pre-eminence. By Him, the Christ, is reconciliation effected. All fullness of the Godhead was pleased *in* Him to dwell and *by* Him to reconcile all things unto God. There is a peculiar phraseology in the passage which may have led the English translators to put in "Father" in verse 19. If the conjecture be correct, they did it not so much because of this verse as of the following, the 20th—"to reconcile . . . unto himself." They could not make out how it could be unto Him unless it were the Father; but I think the context is purposely

so framed, because it is intended to show us, unless I am greatly mistaken, that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ, not one person of that divine fullness acting to the exclusion of the rest. They all had one counsel, not barely similar counsels, as so many creatures might, but one and the same. Hence the object is not to contrast one person with another, but to state that all the fullness was pleased in Him to dwell. It is put in this general form purposely. Then the Spirit of God glides with a scarce perceptible transition from His being the God-man to the work God has done by Him; so you cannot separate clearly the two thoughts, as far as the construction goes in (*ELS AVTON*). Afterward, as before, the Person of Christ is distinct and prominent.

But man was utterly gone, hostile, dead. No moral glory even of the Godhead in Christ could win him back. A deeper work was needed. "Having made peace by the blood of his cross by him to reconcile all things unto himself." All creation was ruined in the fall; and here we have the vast plan of God first sketched before us, the reconciliation of all things, not of men but of things. It was the good pleasure of the Godhead to reconcile all things unto God. Even the Word made flesh, even all the fullness dwelling in Him, failed to reach the desperate case. There was rebellion, there was war. Peace must be made—it could only be made by the blood of Christ's cross. In a word, reconciliation is not the fruit of the incarnation, most blessed as it is; for it was altogether powerless, as far as that is concerned. It brings before us grace and truth in Christ—God Himself in the most precious display of holy love. Nothing is in itself more important than for a person who has found Christ to delight in and dwell upon Him and His moral ways here below. Everything was in exquisite harmony in Him; matchless grace shone out wherever He moved. All was perfect, and yet would it all have been fruitless; for man was as the barren sand.

Therefore we have another and wholly distinct step—"by him to reconcile all things unto himself." All the fullness dwelling in Him was insufficient; it brought God to man, not man to God. All the Godhead was pleased to dwell in Him, and not as a mere passing thing. This was quite independent of

the anointing in due time by the Holy Ghost. It was the continual delight of the whole Godhead to dwell in Him as man. But so far gone was man that this could not deliver him; sin cannot be thus got over. Even God Himself coming down to earth in Christ's Person, His unselfish goodness, His unwearied patient love, not anything found in Christ nor all together, could dispel sin or righteously recover the sinner. Therefore it became manifestly a question of reconciliation "through the blood of his cross."

All things then are to be reconciled, as we see; peace has been made "by the blood of his cross." It is sweet and assuring to think that all has been done to secure the gathering of all things round Christ. It is merely now a question of the time suited in God's wisdom for the manifestation of Christ at the head of all. As far as the efficacious work is concerned, nothing more is to be done. Meanwhile God is calling in the saints who are to share all along with Christ. As it is said in Romans 8, all creation groaneth, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. They are the first fruits. All was subjected to vanity by sin; but now He who came down, God manifest in the flesh, has taken upon Himself the burden of sin, and has made peace by the blood of His cross. Thus He has done all that is needed for God and man. Morally all is done, the price is paid, the work is accepted; so that here too we may say "all things are ready." God would be now justified in purging from the face of creation every trace of misery and decay; if He waits, it is but to save more souls. His long-suffering is salvation. The darkness and the weakness will disappear when our Lord comes with His saints. For the world, His appearing with them in glory is the critical time. The revelation of Christ and the Church from heaven is not the epoch of the rapture, which comes first. The revelation is the manifestation of the Bridegroom and the bride then glorified before the world.

Thus having brought in the universal reconciliation of created things, the Apostle turns to that with which it was so intimately connected: "and you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." I do not doubt there is an intended contrast. The



reconciliation of all things is not yet accomplished. The foundation for *all* is laid, but it is not applied. But meanwhile it is applied to *us* who believe. Us who were in this fearful condition, "now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death." Again, observe, the body of His flesh, the incarnation in itself did not, could not avail; no, nor all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily. For guilty man it must be "through death." It was not through Christ's birth or living energy, but "through death"—not by His doing, divinely blessed as it all was, but by His suffering. "The blood of his cross" brings in much more the idea of a price paid for peace. His "death" seems to be more suitable as the ground of our reconciliation. At any rate "in the body of his flesh through death" contradicts the notion that incarnation was the means of reconciliation. This brings in moral considerations and shows the most solemn vindication of God, the righteous basis for our remission and peace and clearance from all charge and consequence of sin.

"To present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight." Blessed as the death of Christ is, so that God Himself can find no flaw in us or charge against us, which is the meaning here—so perfectly efficacious is this death of Christ in our favor, yet still it supposes our holding fast: "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." Now I take that word "if" decidedly as a condition and nothing else.

It is quite different from chapter 3, "If ye then be risen with Christ," etc. It is the same word, but there should always be a regard to the context. Here, I believe, there *is* a condition implied, whereas chapter 3 simply reasons and exhorts from an allowed fact. This would not make sense in chapter 1.

Unless under specially modifying circumstances, every man, almost every person before conversion, is naturally disposed to be an Arminian (that is, to build on his own righteousness); but when he finds himself undone, yet justified by faith of God's pure grace in Christ, there is often a tendency to rebound violently over to the opposite extreme. When he becomes more matured in the truth, it is no longer a question of party views, but of that which is infinitely larger, even

of God's mind as revealed in His Word. The unconditional parts should be taken in all their absoluteness, and the conditional should be pressed in all their force. The Apostle does not bring this in as a condition of our justification. There grace justifies the ungodly; a condition cannot enter. It would be a denial of grace. For all that, there are unquestionable conditions; but in what? God does not let us certainly know who they are among those who profess the name of Jesus that really believe in Him. Some there were even in those early days who followed the truth for a season and then gave it up. Others gradually slighted the pure gospel for philosophy and ordinances, or at least were disposed to add them to it. Hence the Apostle says, "*If ye continue in the faith.*" There he warns those born of God that they should continue in the faith; but along with this, other things have to be borne in mind. May not real children of God waver and even slip for a season into error? Now I cannot say of any who abandon the faith that they are holy and blameless in the sight of God. One may have a hope from previous facts perhaps; but as long as a soul is thus led of the enemy away from fundamental truth, I cannot, I ought not, to speak too confidently of him as of God. It would be a trifling with such unbelief and increasing the danger to his soul by making light of it. Therefore the Apostle says, "*If ye continue.*" A similar principle applies to him who lives under a cloud of unjudged sin.

So in 1 Corinthians 5 we see that a man guilty of gross sin and therefore put away is to be treated as a "wicked person," although the Holy Ghost in the same chapter speaks of the aim that his spirit might be saved, etc. And the second epistle proves that, spite of all, he was a true believer and on his repentance to be restored to fellowship. The Holy Ghost of course knows perfectly, but we can only judge what God permits to be brought plainly before our eyes. This is of practical value to our souls, for it is often difficult to behave rightly to a person out of communion. We are apt to think too slightly of such cases, and what is the effect of thus treating them? They drag on outside. There is feeble power within of restoration. The sin is superficially judged. If we feel it much, we desire earnestly to get the person back. It ought to be a pain,

a deep grief, whenever souls are put away from the Lord's table. Our desire would then be continually to know they judged themselves and see them restored.

It is not, If ye continue in faith, but "in the faith." When Paul speaks about the common faith, he means the thing believed. So when he speaks about the "one faith," he does not refer to the reality of *our* faith, but to the objective truth received. Real believers or not, if they forsook the faith, how could they be owned as such? Modern times have greatly thrown people upon what is inward or subjective; whereas "the faith" is the revelation that is offered to faith, outside the man. It is a great mercy that in these last days, to truth, the truth in the Person of Christ, great prominence has been given. One cannot absolutely pronounce on an individual's faith; but we can judge of the faith he owns, and tell whether what he professes is the truth or not. Love would assume, if a man professes the faith and there is nothing clean contrary to it in his words and ways, that it is real faith. A person may be sincere in what is wrong, or insincere in what is right; but the truth is an unbending standard. If one judged on the ground of an individual's heart, one could never speak at all; for of that who can pronounce but God? If one acts on the ground of *the* faith, the moment a man goes against the truth, giving up what he professed, we are bound to judge it, leaving the question of his heart's faith in God's hands.

The Apostle urges also, "and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." The Colossian saints were in danger of slipping away; for they were striving to make themselves holier by asceticism or other efforts, not by the application of Christ to judge themselves. But no, says the Apostle; it is in the body of His flesh through death that ye are presented holy and unblamable, if ye continue in the faith, etc., and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard, etc. What is "the hope of the gospel"? It is in a heavenly Christ who died for us, giving us the assurance of being with Himself there. The hope of Israel (one can hardly say of the law) was the earth; this "hope of the gospel" is above. The Colossians were most unwittingly but practically losing sight of their heavenly hope, because the thought of adding to

Christ philosophy or ordinances tends to deprive one of Christ. He calls it the gospel which they had heard; he would not admit of any other. It was that which had been "preached to every creature which is under heaven, whereof I Paul am made a minister." How the Apostle puts forward that which some then, as now, would make cheap—the being a minister of the gospel! He does not regard what would exalt himself in the eyes of the would-be professionists, but what gives glory to God and His grace in Christ. There is a stress accordingly upon "I" here.

I should judge that there was a slight put upon the gospel by some of those who were exercising an evil influence at Colosse. They may have thought it good in its place as awakening the unconverted; but what had Christians to do with it? The Apostle insists not only on the dignity but also on the depths of the gospel. No doubt, a Christian does not need it in the same way as the unconverted; for he is the one who has found rest, has remission of sins, justification, sonship, etc., while the other has no real link with God. A Christian, therefore, does not listen to the gospel as if it were an unknown sound, or as if he had not certainly received it. But he rejoices in it still, and admires with increasing fervor the matchless display of God's grace therein. The Apostle therefore takes particular pains to say that he, Paul, was made a minister of the gospel. He did not consider it a thing merged in his apostleship, but emphatically declares himself a minister, not only of the Church, but of the glad tidings to every creature under heaven. It was evident then that if any at Colosse had been induced to regard that message as a thing too elementary for the saints to occupy themselves with, the Apostle did not sympathize with such feelings. He served and gloried in the gospel.

It is wrong, of course, to put myself on the same ground as the unconverted person, as if I needed it; but it is also depriving myself of much if I do not delight in it, for its own sake, so to speak, as the vindication of God Himself. No other part of the truth brings out such a display of grace and divine righteousness as the gospel. As far as the testimony to souls is concerned, it may be more what relates to their need as lost

sinners; but for Christians it is of no small importance to have the heart engaged with its active grace, and the mind filled with its vast scope, and the conscience invigorated by the truth which proclaims how perfectly the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. It is impossible to see how the gospel *vindicates* God until a soul has peace with Him. This is practically important. A person that barely knows God's mercy in Christ, has relief, has the remedy for sin; but such a remedy does not always bring in the sight of God fully vindicated. It is more the idea of the scapegoat, than of the goat that was killed. In the gospel we see not only the resource of our sins, but God's truth and majesty and love and whole character glorified. It is not only a question of evil judged and sins forgiven, but a testimony to His rich grace in Christ.

But the Apostle adds here, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church; whereof I am made a minister." vv. 24, 25. It appears that the two ministries, the connection of them, and the assertion of the Apostle's relation to both, are intimated. As to the gospel, he says, "Whereof I, Paul, am made a minister." So also it is here; but, inasmuch as this was a more intimate thing, it is added, "According to the dispensation of God," etc. The gospel of which he was made the minister leads him at once to speak of his sufferings for them, not exactly the sufferings of the gospel, but his sufferings for them. Next, he speaks of filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, etc., for His body's sake, which is the Church. No doubt there was that which pertained exclusively to the Saviour in substitution for us. But in all other respects Christ did not suffer, however perfectly, so as to shut out others, His saints, from fellowship with Him. His sufferings were absolutely perfect, as the witness of righteousness, as man upon earth and the witness of grace as on God's part. But there was far more than testimony in the cross when made sin for us, and all that God was as judging it fell on Him there. Righteousness and grace were the occasion of His sufferings in life here below; the holy judgment of sin was that which characterized His sufferings upon the cross, that God might be able

righteously to show His grace to us who believe without any question of judgment remaining.

Again, the Apostle rejoices in his sufferings, instead of thinking them hard or shrinking from them. What a contrast with Peter in the close of Matthew 16! Christ did not monopolize them, as it were; He left some for others. The sufferings spoken of here are mainly sufferings of love for the Church, for the saints of God; but they also include what the Apostle suffered as being a witness for Christ in this world. They were real external sufferings from enemies, as he says, "in my flesh." He does not make it merely a question of his spirit; although, if this had not gone along with the trials, there would have been no value in the suffering. But he did not take it easily even as to his body. Some at Colosse, we know from the end of Colossians 2, were contending for ascetic practice in mortification of the body, which, the Apostle lets them know, is quite compatible with thorough puffing up of the flesh. But, as for him, he would fill up the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake. Paul was pre-eminently a minister of the Church, in a sense in which others were not. No doubt, the mystery was revealed by the Spirit unto the holy apostles and prophets. But God had entrusted it to Paul to complete His Word.

There are two great parts in this hid but now manifest mystery (v. 26). The first is that Christ should be set in heaven above all principalities and powers, and have the entire universe given to Him, as Head over the inheritance on the footing of redemption — Himself exalted as Head over all things heavenly and earthly, and the Church united to Him as His body, He being thus given as Head to the Church *over* all things. Then the other side of the mystery is Christ in the saints here below, and in such a sort as to bring in the Gentiles with the utmost freedom. "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles [or nations], which is Christ in you the hope of glory." v. 27. The hope of glory is the hope of all the glory that flows out of His heavenly place as now at God's right hand.

In Ephesians the Apostle dwells more upon the first of these aspects, in Colossians on the second. Hence the point here is not our being in Christ as Head over all, but Christ

in us, the hope of all. But it is in contrast in both cases with Jewish things. The Messiah's reigning on earth over Israel, with the nations rejoicing also, is a true expectation gathered from the Old Testament prophets. In Colossians it is Christ now in us, but the glory not yet come. Christ in us is the hope of the glory that is coming by-and-by when we shall be glorified and appear with Christ. This was a state of things entirely foreign to Jewish anticipations. Christ in heaven and the saints not yet with Him there, but waiting to be with Him, and meanwhile Christ in them the hope of glory, but of a glory not yet come. There was nothing like this in the older oracles. Then they could not have expected that Christ would be in heaven and a people be one with Him there, still less that Christ should be in them, Gentiles or not, here.

It is well to weigh the expression, "to complete the word of God" (v. 25). It is not the mere idea of writing a book; for James and Peter and John had done this, and yet they could not be said "to complete the word of God." It was not only bringing out truths already revealed, but adding a certain portion that was unrevealed. Even Revelation did not do this in the same sense. We have there a fuller development of what had been previously referred to, a giving further revelations as to prophecy, but all that was not completing the Word of God. It does not mean that Paul was the last of inspired writers; for if he had written before the others of the New Testament, it would still have been true that he completed the Word of God.

Christ is said to be in us here, not dwelling in our hearts by faith, but actually the hope of glory. The *hope* of glory is contrasted with the Jews having Christ to reign over them in Palestine, bringing in manifested glory. The Apostle speaks of saints as now down here, but Christ in them the hope of the glory they will have with Him by-and-by above. It is Christ's life in us in its full risen character of display. The epistle to the Colossians never rises above it.

The Holy Ghost, it has been noticed, is hardly spoken of in this epistle. In their then state the introduction of Him would not have been good for them; they would have used the Holy Ghost apart from Christ, as something to draw the

eye away from Christ. A religion completely of forms makes much of the Holy Ghost, but it puts the Holy Ghost in the clergy as dispensers of blessing, and thus Christ is dishonored. Again, there are Christians who have no forms at all and who consequently make much of the Holy Ghost but apart from Christ. There was much of the old legal feeling that had come in at Colosse; therefore the Apostle presses upon them the truth of the riches of the glory of this mystery being among the Gentiles. God did not reveal this mystery when the Church was at Jerusalem; indeed it was only fully brought out among the Gentiles. That is, the full heavenly character of it is only properly known when the Gentiles are in the foreground. Hence Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, is the very one who especially handles it. The full gospel is not mere forgiveness, but deliverance, liberty, and union with Christ above in Spirit.

"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Perfect in Christ means full grown. A man may be very happy, may enjoy the pardon of his sins, etc.; but without the unfolding of this heavenly secret (that is, Christ in the saints and the heavenly glory connected with it), he can hardly be said to be full grown in Christ. This "every man" is very striking here; the repeated individualizing is the more beautiful in connection with the body. The two truths are singularly characteristic of Christianity, which unites the more opposite things in a way that nothing else does. In the Millennium, individuals will not have such an important place as now; nor will there be "the body" on earth. Now "he that hath an ear" comes in as well as "what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; there is the richest place of blessing given both to the individual and the Church, the body of Christ; and both are brought out in the fullness. The human way, on the contrary, is that if what is public and corporate be much pressed, the individual suffers; so also vice versa.

Christianity makes every individual of eternal value to God, and also shows the Church's place wherein you find the large feeling of desire and self-sacrifice and seeking the good of the whole. Paul who brings in the Church so prominently, says pointedly, "every man." "Warning every man and teach-



ing every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." "Whereunto" has reference to the need. "I also labor striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily." Strong words are used here, to show what it cost him. It all supposes great difficulty, and the need of a power entirely beyond himself. It proves the necessity of Christ working in it all. It was not only for those who had seen his face, but for others, too, as we see from chapter 2:1. What is to be noted is this: while the Apostle loved those whom he had seen, there was no such thing as oversight or insensibility as to those whom he had never seen. It was for the Church he felt, for the saints as such, whether known or unknown; and more than this, he had a keen conflict for them because of their difficulties.

## CHAPTER II

Now he commences showing them their danger, but he first wished them to know what a combat he had for them, and for them also at Laodicea, and as many as had not then seen his face in the flesh (v. 1). "That their hearts might be comforted." They were not happy now; they were oppressed; they were getting clouded in their thoughts, and losing the clearness of view they had, "being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, in which mystery [for that is the point] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." vv. 2, 3. There were hindrances to their apprehension of this mystery. His great desire was, nevertheless, that they should understand it well. A person may be a Christian, seeing the grace of God in Christ, and yet be comparatively poor in his thoughts and very feeble in his apprehension of the counsels and ways of God. He may never have been led into this fullness of the understanding of this mystery. Without this it is impossible to have all these treasures. "In which [mystery] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This brings us into another atmosphere, as it were. Failure in apprehension shows a moral hindrance. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

To some minds there may be difficulty in the strong language on the one hand, in which the Apostle speaks of the Colossians' faith and order; and on the other, in the solemn warnings with which the epistle abounds. It might seem hard at first sight to reconcile the steadfastness of their faith in Christ with the warning we have seen given them—"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled." All we have to do is to believe both. What it really proves is, that no blessed order or steadfastness can guarantee a soul that admits wrong thoughts and corrupt principles that shroud, weaken, or lower the glory of Christ. Thus, the seeming incongruity makes the danger more apparent and striking. The fact of their order

and the steadfastness of the faith in Christ that had characterized them (v. 5) were in themselves no effectual bulwark against the evil that menaced them. The Apostle felt, and lets them know, that, though they were so blessed, yet by admitting the enticing words of others, their souls would be injured and undermined. No soul, no matter what the blessing in time past or present, can afford to trifle with that which upsets the Person or glory of Christ. The Colossians had been remarkably favored, and the Apostle rejoiced in beholding their order and steadfast faith in Christ; still in the very verse before, he cautions them "lest any man should beguile you with enticing words" (v. 4).

What he presses upon them is, that as they had received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, they should walk in Him (v. 6), abiding as they had begun. Speculation, covered over with plausible language, was what they had to guard against. Therefore, though absent in the flesh, the Apostle says he was with them in spirit, joying and beholding their order, etc. For this very reason they were to be warned of what would mar the Saviour's glory in their testimony. The finest fruit is most easily injured. They would thus practically lose Christ. He does not the least call in question their real blessing thus far. On the contrary, he reminds them of it, and tells them to walk in Christ, "rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught"; not downcast because of perils, but "abounding therein with thanksgiving" (v. 7). It is very close work, the object being to exclude the persuasive speech of false men that, if received, would steal them away imperceptibly from Christ.

When we are at rest in Christ before God, we can enter in and behold the manifestation of Himself in Christ, after the most blessed sort. It is very important to see Christ not only in His work of reconciliation, but as revealing the Father. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." The Holy Ghost does exalt Christ, no doubt, but then the Son is never exalted, so to speak, at the expense of the Father, any more than the Father can accept honor where the Son is degraded.

The important thing for Christians is to be true to what they believe and confess, or rather to what God has revealed for their faith and confession. Whatever takes us away from the grace and truth which came by Christ, always tends to subvert even Christ Himself. The Colossians had been heretofore happy and really steadfast in their faith in Christ; but they were now allowing doctrines among them which, if not rooted out, would infallibly lead them away from Christ. Here lay their danger. It is astonishing how eagerly and easily Christians are apt to admit something new. The Apostle in this case refers to philosophical speculations, which seem to have been brought in at Colosse, as well as Jewish elements, if indeed they were not combined.

It was not enough for them to have Christ; they were to walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, assured in the faith, and not caught by these novel dreams, whether of an intellectual or a religious kind. It was thus an early error, that philosophy might be united to Christianity in order to make divine revelation more palatable to earnest, thoughtful minds. It had been all very well, they thought, to preach Christ at first simply; but now that it was no longer a question of a few lowly Galileans, why not address themselves to the great and wise of the earth, sick as many were of heathenism, and repelled by cold Judaism? And, if so, why not meet them as much as possible on their own ground? Why not engraft into Christianity some of the common sense of Aristotle, or, still better, the lofty aspirations of Plato, or yet more readily such high and noble sentiments as Philo represents in his Biblical essays?

Philosophy is one great bane of Christianity now as in these early days. The whole scheme of God's truth and ways is blotted out or has no room left for it in the teaching of philosophy. They overlook creation and the fall. They defy conscience, which man acquired by the fall. They ignore sin and God's judgment of sin. So also God's grace is unknown and the atonement its fruit. Rationalists would reduce divine truth to a mere set of inferences that people draw. But truth is never a conclusion. The moment I draw a conclusion, I am on the ground of science. Thus logic is a natural science, the

handmaid, one may say of all others, which submits facts to it; but what has this to do with submitting to the truth of God? Revelation may pronounce on things as they are in man, as it also gives us things as they are from God; it does not merely show us that such or such a thing must be, which is the province of human reasoning; the truth reveals to us that a thing *is*. A poor soul might be perplexed to understand what *must be*; but no one that hears the testimony can avoid receiving or rejecting, if God declares that a given thing or person *is*. Hence the vast importance of faith.

The Colossians were beginning to let in two snares — a reasoning mind, and certain ascetic mortifications of the body. The one was in connection with philosophy, the other had its root in Judaism. These were the two great errors then slipping in, of whose real character and source they were not aware. The Apostle warns them (v. 8), though he had just told them he rejoiced in their faith and order. How sad in *them* to slip! But this is not all. He as good as says, Take care of what you are doing, of letting go what has produced such fruits, for the fair promises some are holding out to you. They tell you these new thoughts and ways can be held along with Christ; but let me say that you are embracing and taking up that which will frustrate, sooner or later, the truth which you now profess. The effect invariably is, that those who are not really born of God receive these inner dreams and outer forms instead of Christianity, while true believers are seriously damaged, and lose their delight in Christ and their testimony for Him. The one error suits the speculative, the other would meet those of a more practical turn of mind. No wonder, therefore, he exhorts them to be "rooted and built up in Christ, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." This last word is much to be weighed. I suppose their thanksgivings were beginning to wane, for such is the immediate effect of other objects intruding into the place of Christ.

"See lest there shall be any one that leads you as his prey through philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the rudiments of the world, and not according to Christ." The earth gives clouds and not light.

Man promises and undertakes much, but he can really give nothing but the blinding deceits of the master he is enslaved to. There is the deepest possible necessity for these warnings. Speculation about the origin of things, or about the eternity of matter, for instance, in which the Orientals, Gnostics, etc., delighted, might not have seemed directly dangerous. People are ready enough to say, Our philosophy is one thing, our religion another. They might reason then, as since, that the world must have been made out of something always in existence. This may sound plausible to some minds, but it has a great flaw for the believer; it makes nothing of God and gives His Word the lie. Matter becomes the great circumstance before the mind, and God is made like man — a mere active mind, a manufacturing power.

How grandly the scripture of the Galilean fisherman rebukes all such dreamers! "All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made." How aptly the error had been already met in chapter 1:16! "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him." The idea of the eternity of matter brings in from the first something outside God, independent and antagonistic; for this was the further deduction from the actual state of the world. Hence they reasoned of the two first principles, the one good, the other evil. This was the very error which was so much followed out in and interwoven into heathen philosophy, especially in the east, as indeed to this day. It is evident that the principle as to the eternity of matter, once admitted, leads the way to an abyss of falsehood and moral evil; and he would soonest fall into these inward or outward excesses who reasons most from his false starting point. Faith repudiates philosophy, not only as a rival but as an ally; it rests only on God's Word; it accepts that Word as absolute and exclusive. Therefore had the Apostle the best reason for warning them against philosophy and vain deceit, "according to the rudiments of the world and not according to Christ." They savor of, as they spring from, man as he is, not Christ; they suit the world, not heaven, nor

those who belong to it, even while they are upon the earth. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (v. 9).

What gives a more wonderful view of Christ than this truth which the simplest believer knows, or ought to know, however little able to explain it? There is nothing like it. There alone we have the truth. We know God now; and how? Not by reasoning, as if thus we could search and find Him out. We know Him in Christ as a living Person who lived once bodily in this world, who still has His body above the world. We know from God, from His Word, that in the Person of Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," not merely in His spirit, but really in Him bodily, though He be now glorified. He had a real, true body from the incarnation; but He had all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him thus.

Nor is this all. The Apostle adds, "Ye are complete in Him" (v. 10); so you do not want philosophy even if it contained anything good, still less since it is positively bad. What we want is to enjoy Christ better and to walk more according to Him—not to glean other things from man as if they could enrich Christ, whereas they do but corrupt the truth. Man fallen is away from God, and under the power of the devil. This is the fact that makes these human notions so false and ruinous. Philosophical principles spring from death and can only produce death. In all heathenism (and perhaps one might say as much of Christendom) there is nothing more deadly than its philosophy. It is only less deceitful than the world's religion. It sounds reasonable, and a man gets charmed with the beauty or boldness of thoughts, imaginations, and language. Faith destroys both superstition and infidelity by the truth of God, and this by the revelation of Christ. The fullness of the Godhead never dwelt in the Father bodily, or in the Holy Ghost, but only in Christ. He was the only One of whom this wonderful reality could be affirmed. The whole fullness in Him dwelt and dwells still. "The Father that dwelleth in me [said He here below], he doeth the works." Again, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils," etc. Here we have not only the Son, but in and by Him the three Per-

sons of the Godhead active in grace in this evil world. And faith receives what Scripture says of the unseen and eternal; faith acts on God's revealed mind as to the present. Unbelieving man refuses what is above himself and draws inferences from what he knows or does not know; but God will destroy both him and them. It is not only that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, but we are (not that fullness, but) filled full in Him. We may be and are said to be the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1), but never, of course, of the Godhead.

Hence we "are complete in him who is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body [of the sins] of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." vv. 10, 11. This is expressly in contrast with the external ordinance of circumcision. It should be "putting off the body of the flesh," not the body "of the sins" of the flesh. The true reading makes it a more complete thing; it is not a question of sins, but rather of sin in the nature. "Sins" would hardly be in keeping with the scope of the passage or phrase. It does not refer to the literal act of circumcising, but to Christ's death. When we believe in Christ, we have all the value of His death made true of us. This is here called circumcision not made by hands, in contrast with the ancient ordinance. The meaning and spiritual thought of circumcision is the mortification of human nature, man as he is being treated as a dead thing. It is Christ's death that gives us this privilege. We are brought into association with His death and have all its value in parting with our own ruined condition, "the body of the flesh," when we receive Him by faith. This circumcision supersedes all others, which in no way stripped off our evil state as man in the flesh.

"Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through the faith of the operation of God who raised him out of the dead." This brings in not so much Christ's personal glory, as His work. The first chapter gives us chiefly His personal glory; and even though it spoke of His work, it was the reconciliation of all things, and of the saints withal, meanwhile, before the glory is revealed. Chapter 2



presses His work upon the saints. I have no doubt the wisdom of the Holy Ghost is shown in this; we have first Himself and His work in general, then the specific value and effect of His work for us and on us. There His headship is doubly unfolded with precision; here the fact of His being the Head of *all* principality and authority, is just alluded to, giving emphasis to our completeness in Him.

The reference to circumcision is clearly bound up with Christ's death, etc.—not the legal act to which He submitted, nor a question of His Person, but of His work applied to us. This is entirely confirmed by the statement of our being buried with Him in baptism, in which, says he, ye have also been raised with Him. The great point is the linking us to Christ. By Him alone the work was done; but when we believe in Him, we are brought into its efficacy and acquire by grace a common position with Him. It is not merely that it was by virtue of Him, but in Him this great work was wrought, whereby we have a place in and with Him. The initiatory institution of Christianity sets forth this immense distinctive blessing of the Christian. We owned in baptism that we died in Christ's death out of the condition in which we naturally lived; and now we are raised with Him by faith of the operation of God who raised Him out of the dead. We are thus entered on a new state (not, of course, our bodies yet, but our souls). The practical application of both death and resurrection with Christ, we shall soon see in the hands of the Apostle.

Much as the Spirit of God brings out the quickening power of Christ in this epistle, He never pursues the ultimate or highest consequences of the work of Christ. Quickened or raised up by Him, or rather raised together with Him, is the utmost we find here; hence there He stops. Again in chapter 3, although He says, "*Seek* those things that are above," He does not say *we* are there, but, on the contrary, looks at the saints as being on earth, while seeking the things that are above. Thus, this epistle never goes so far as the Ephesians; it nowhere says we are seated in heavenly places. As we have seen and as is clear, the current of the communications of grace was interrupted; there was a hindrance before the Apostle. The Holy Ghost cannot freely show the saints the things of

Christ, where He has to show them their own things. He turns aside to occupy Himself with the truth practically, and apply it to them, which is never the sign of souls being thoroughly bright; for there ought not to be such a need for arresting the flow of grace and truth. In Ephesians, on the contrary, the work of Christ is carried out to all its fullest consequences; the healthy state of the saint is unfolded, and exhortations follow proportionately high.

We have an instance here of the way in which the Apostle, having brought in a general principle, turns to them and says, "you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses"; then in verse 16, he goes aside to show how very pointedly and completely the work of God would take them away from the things of the flesh and law—"Having blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us," etc. Yet you want to get ordinances again! The only effect of this handwriting must be against you; it is very strongly expressed, and the Apostle repeats it in a double form.

These Colossian saints were not so far gone in legalism as to put Christians under the ten commandments as a rule of life. To bring in ordinances even, was not so ruinous, because they at least derive their entire value from the truth of Christ, couched and shadowed forth in them; whereas, there is nothing like making a rule of life of the law for awakening the spirit of self-righteousness in the confident, and of distrust and despair in more diffident souls, reversing exactly the way of grace with both. The Apostle insists, that even to let in the principle of ordinances now is to renounce the fundamental truth of death and resurrection (that is, of Christianity), because they suppose men alive in the world, not dead and risen in Christ. Those led aside may not mean to do anything of the sort, but the enemy does who misleads them. It is going back to dealings of a preparatory kind, into flesh and the world, and is in effect a forsaking of the glorious privileges of Christ to do so. The Apostle does not dwell here as in Galatians on the consequences of our being made debtors to fulfill the whole law, if we venture under it at all; but he shows, that it is a denial of *Christ, as we know Him*, if we allow of going

back to law in any form, ordinances or not. It is the folly of making a merit of a return to the discipline of the rod and to the value of the letter game and of the dissected map and of the toy rewards for full grown men.

It is evident that, in the handling of men of philosophic tone, the rite of circumcision might be made a much more spiritual thing than any man could work out of the law as a rule of life. For they might say, as men have said, that circumcision was pressed only as the emblem of what we have in Christ, an ancient and divine, though of course, outward sign of spiritual grace. But the step was fatal; for if they admitted that sign, it was a recurrence to shadows when the substance was come; it was a relinquishment of grace too for the principle of law. The fathers had circumcision, no doubt, before Moses, which was then especially connected with promise. Still, although it was originally before the nation's responsibility to the law was pledged at Sinai, it was after that so imbedded in the law that they cannot be separated. Take up circumcision now; and if you do not put yourself, the law puts you, under its whole system, and separates you in principle from Christ as an exalted heavenly Head who has accomplished redemption.

Thus, if there was one ordinance that more than any might symbolize with promise and grace, it was circumcision; yet so strong was the Apostle, that he tells the Galatians, that, admitting it all, they became debtors to do the whole law. To the Colossians he goes farther, and shows how it contradicts and sets aside the work of Christ, and the place of association with Him, into which we are thereby brought before God. Hence he here intimates what sort of circumcision we already have as Christians; it is of divine operation and not human: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh," etc. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him," etc.

In Galatians, the law is in connection with justification; in Colossians, with Christ risen from the dead and in heaven. Christ, at any rate, is there; and although we are not seen to be in Him there, His exaltation to God's right hand really

decides our place as dead with Him and risen with Him; not merely as justified by His blood, but dead and risen with Him. Of all this exceeding rich roll of blessing, subjection to ordinances is the denial; for what has Christ to do with the law now? And it is with Christ as He is, not as He was under law, that we are associated. In Hebrews we have another thing; it is not our death and resurrection with Christ, but Christ now appearing in the presence of God for us in glory, which is founded upon the perfection of His work, His one offering, which has forever put away sin. He is there at the right hand of God because He has by Himself purged our sins. The law as a code or system for us is inconsistent with Christ's place in glory as the bright exhibition of our triumph through God's grace; and such is the Christian way of looking at Christ. We do not, it is true, find our association with Christ dead or risen in Hebrews; still less is it the display of our union with Him above; neither is it justification, as in Romans and Galatians; but the value of His work measured by His position in heaven shines there with special luster. Any allowance of ordinances now is proved to be a gainsaying of His work and of the glory He has in heaven, in danger too of leading to apostasy.

From verse 13, then, the Apostle takes great pains to set before the saints at Colosse their condition without and with Christ: "You being dead in your sins . . . hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." The very life we have received as believers is the token that our trespasses are gone. If God has quickened us with the life of Christ, He has forgiven us all trespasses. It is impossible that life in Christ dead and risen could have anything against it. There was everything against the believer once; but the possession of life in a risen Saviour necessarily attests that all is righteously forgiven to him who believes. It is a remarkable way of putting the matter, an exactly parallel case to which you can scarce find in any other part of Scripture.

In general, as we too well know, recourse is had to ordinances for meeting shortcomings, whetting spiritual appetite, etc. It is never in Christendom the open or despite denial of Christ, but the supply of certain aids to faith (!) or feelings

besides Christ. This is precisely what the Apostle affirms to be so unbelieving and evil. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us," observe, not against *you*, but against *us*. When the Apostle comes to speak of the operation of the law, he will not say "you," but "us"; as, again, "which was contrary to *us*, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." The fact is, the Galatian saints, being Gentiles, had never been under law at all; and therefore he does not say "you"; but when he spoke of sins just before, he said "you"; "*You* being dead in your sins," etc. This makes the distinction very striking. "You" occurs in verse 13, because it applies to any sinner now, Jew or Gentile; while it is "us" in verse 14, because none but Jews, strictly speaking, were under law. The allusion to handwriting was very notable also; for the Gentiles had never put their hands to it, whereas the Jews had affirmed "all that the Lord hath spoken we will do," and thereon had been sprinkled with the blood as a seal of the legal covenant they had signed under the penalty of death.

The Apostle declares this was contrary to them and only brought in, as we know, condemnation, darkness, and death. What has Christ done in respect to all this? He has blotted it out, taken it out of the way. Do you want, like the Colossians, to bring it back again? Christ nailed it to His cross — an expression of entire triumph over it. "And having spoiled principalities and powers he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

It is very interesting to see the way in which the power of evil is viewed according to the place we are in. When the Church appears, it is not so much Satan's power on earth (which was the way the Jews felt it chiefly); but we have the special disclosure, that he is the prince of the power of the air, and that the wicked spirits are in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). This in no way clashes with what we have in the Old Testament! only now it is brought out more fully, and shown to be the position in which they are as opposed to the Christian. In Revelation 12 we see them (the dragon and his angels) ejected from heaven. They wanted to keep the heavenly places; they desired to hinder the Church, and dishonor God in His saints, that they might have a righteous claim over them, as it were.

It was intolerable to them that such as had behaved badly on earth should be at last with the Son of God in heavenly places.

Alas! how many here below of the very race whom God so distinguishes in His mercy betray that they are of their father the devil, by love of falsehood and by hatred of God's grace and truth. Here we have the effect of the work of Christ upon these powers—leading them in triumph on the cross. It is not so high a tone of triumph as in Ephesians 4, where it is said, Christ led captivity captive. The powers that led believers into captivity were themselves vanquished. The reason is manifest. It was when He ascended up on high. Here we hear of what was done on the cross, the power of the cross; but there it is the public manifestation of the victory, in ascending up on high. The great battle was won. Christ had forever defeated the powers of evil for the joint heirs. This ascending up on high, and leading captivity captive, is the witness that they are powerless against the Christian. The language is always adapted to the point of view which the Holy Ghost is taking—whether it be of earth or heaven, whether of Israel or the Church. More than this, it depends on how and where He looks at the saints now. If they are viewed as in the wilderness, there is a different style and figure. Satan is spoken of as “a roaring lion,” which suits the wilderness; and hence this is not the way he is spoken of in Ephesians, but in 1 Peter.

Now comes the practical turn to which the Apostle applies this. “Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a feast, or new-moon, or sabbaths; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” vv. 16, 17. A Christian man who knows the victory of Christ for us should not surely entertain the idea of going back to these elementary forms of working good. Hold fast your actual place in Christ, act consistently with it. As to eating and drinking or ordinances relative to the year, month, and week (and the Apostle takes particular care to speak not merely of feast or new moon but of sabbaths) remember that these things but prefigure the body or substantial good found really and only in Christ. In fact, these times and seasons point chiefly to what God will give His people by-and-by. The new moon was a remarkable type of Israel being renewed after fading away, as

the sabbath was the type of the rest of God which He will yet enjoy and share. But whether it be peace or drink offerings or the feasts in general, they are connected as the shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. This we have. The Jew had the shadow, and he will have the things to come by the grace of God under the new covenant by-and-by. We are given the substance of Christ now. It is a question here of Jewish days. The Lord's day has nothing to do with Judaism; it is not only apart from, but in contrast with that system.

The Lord's day is as distinctly a Christian institution as the Lord's supper, the Jew having nothing to do with either. It is very important to see that God has put honor upon the day of resurrection and grace. When people are radically loose or begin to slip away from the Lord, an early symptom is carelessness about this day. There ought to be an exercised conscience about it, not only for our own selves, but also as to servants within and others without our houses. It is of very great consequence that the sense of liberty and grace should not even have the appearance of laxity or selfishness.

It is not exactly said the body is Christ. It is said "the Lord is that spirit," not that body, which was within the letter of the law. "The body" is used in contrast with "the shadow." There is no substance in a shadow, but we have the body which is of Christ. The twofold idea is that, while the substance is of Him, He is the spirit of all. Verse 16 deals chiefly with a Judaizing character of evil; but verse 18 goes farther and shows a kind of prying into the unseen, not so much the religious use or misuse of the seen, which was the Jewish snare, but dabbling with philosophy, specially of the Orientals. There was a great appearance of humility in all this, as there always is in false systems. The worship of angels seemed right and due, especially as no term peculiar to divine worship was used. Let it be ever so modified, still the Apostle speaks of it strongly. "Let no man deprive you of your reward, doing his will in humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen,\* vainly puffed up by the mind

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\*Some of the best authorities omit the negative and are followed by Lachmann, Alford, etc., but in my judgment mistakenly. The sphere of angels was invisible, and the saint is not to pry there

of his flesh." The Orientals indulged in abundant speculation about angels. It is true there are such beings; but it is the prying into such subjects that is so evil. They have to do with us, but not we with them. Our business is with God. Now it seemed to be a reasonable inference that if angels had to do with us, we must have to do with them; and inasmuch as they had to do with God immediately, why should we not have recourse to them with Him? It was not an unnatural thought; what then makes it so grievous an error?

It is the setting aside of Christ who is the Head of all and so above angels. Christ is the One who determines our relation before God; and for all our need with God, we have Christ the great High Priest. Thus the putting angels in this place is a double dishonor to Christ. Such a speculator was "vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." It might be plausible, but it injured not only the soul's enjoyment of Christ but His nature and glory to indulge in thoughts of the kind. "And not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, by joints and bands being ministered to and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." v. 19. It was false teachers who were thus depriving the saints of their blessing. These men habitually and instinctively seek to ingratiate themselves with the children of God, whose unsuspecting simplicity exposes them to be carried away by them. The worship of angels was one method in which the evil showed itself there and evinced its false character. The Holy Spirit is come down to glorify Christ, not angels. He who went beyond Scripture after angels, certainly did not hold fast the Head. The reference here to ministry is not at all the same as in Ephesians, where the Apostle enters into it copiously and shows the spiritual gifts in their chief forms from the highest down to the least, by which the body works for itself the building of itself up in love. Hence, if souls came together in a very simple way, it might still be for edification. Here all is put together, not expanded and distinguished as in Ephesians.

If God has led such into the place where Christ's headship (I may add, too, the Holy Ghost's presence) is held and acted on, how can they expect blessing from those who do not see but believe in what God reveals.



nor act upon it? These truths are fundamental for the Church, ministry, etc. We have to hold to the will of God; and God has His own will as to all this, and His own wisdom and way, which ought to be something in our eyes. Here we are told of joints and bands—the various means which Christ employs for the spiritual blessing and profit of His people. It enables the body to work better; it concentrates the saints around Christ, and for His glory. It is well to seek the diffusion of blessing to others; but for the saints, the truest thing is the power of gathering to Christ Himself, not merely sending out servants, but gathering to Christ as Lord where there is need of spiritual power to hold together. This is to increase “with the increase of God.” There is then enlargement, comfort, and consolation. The power that is expressed is not in conversion only, but works within in positive blessing and self-judgment.

Here we have the application spiritually of these two great truths, the death and the resurrection of Christ. They had been already put together in verse 12. “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him.” “And you, being dead in your sins, hath he quickened together with him.” v. 13. Now, from verse 20 to 23, we have the consequences of being thus dead with Christ, as in chapter 3, from the first verse onward, we have the meaning of the resurrection of Christ—that which it secures and to which the Holy Ghost calls us as thus risen with Christ.

The use that is made of our death with Christ is not that we are redeemed. In this point of view the *blood* of Christ is ever made prominent. It is not that the forgiveness of all trespasses is omitted, but the death of Christ and our association with Him goes much farther here and introduces us to another line of truth altogether. We might have seen the offering of His body, the shedding of His blood, and there might have been no presentation of death with Him. What is here founded upon our being dead with Christ is the having nothing to do with nature or the world in the things of God. The whole force of the world’s religion denies death with Christ; it does not see and will not admit the total ruin of man as he is. What the world thinks of in a religion is that which will suit people in every variety of condition. Human wisdom

provides for each and all, for the becoming religious observance of the entire population of a land. Thus all decent people, all who are not scandalous livers, etc., are made worshipers, and have a religion adapted to their thoughts of themselves and God, mainly occupied with what man essays to do for God. It is a mixture of heathenism with Jewish forms, and finds its element in certain abstinences as its holiness. As there can be no positive enjoyment of Christ, the negative must be its essential characteristic. God embodied these very elements in Judaism, which was a religion of the flesh and a worldly sanctuary. He Himself made the experiment, so to speak, of an immense system of restrictions, which is the only conceivable plan for a man as such to be holy to the Lord. Hence we find the trial under every advantage of this kind of worship in the Levitical law. Besides the restraint put on man's will morally in the ten words, particular meats and drinks were forbidden. They were not even to touch certain ceremonially unclean objects. All this had to do with man in the flesh, though I doubt not that every ordinance in the Jewish system had a weighty meaning as shadowing better things in Christ. There were always precious truths couched under these forms and ceremonies. The letter kills (that is, the mere outward husk of the system), but the Spirit gives life, wherever there was faith to lay hold of the spiritual import.

Now if we are "*dead with Christ*," where is the application to us of "*touch not, taste not, handle not*"? Such injunctions disappear entirely, because, if already and really dead with Christ, I am outside this kind of language and ideas. You may as well exhort a dead man as to his old wants or duties. The old religious system for man in the flesh is absolutely done with for the Christian. It is to contradict the foundation on which he stands, yea, his very baptism. In Christ he is dead to the world. Hence, if a Christian mingle with the world's religion, he invariably loses the sense of being dead with Christ, as well as the true judgment of the world and man. The only means by which the world could ever be religious is by a resort to the law, as we see in every national system, and indeed in every effort to win the acceptance of

man as such. But this is now to give up Christ dead and risen, little as men think it.

Here the Apostle seems to allude to the general system of human restriction in religious matters rather than to any particular part of the Old Testament. When a man dies, he leaves behind him his wealth, rank, ease, reputation, energy, that constituted his enjoyment in this life. So does the Christian from the starting point, by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection. Thus it is a great truth on which he is called to act while he is still on the earth. In Christ he is now dead to the world. There is in many Christians the entire overlooking of this truth either as a privilege for enjoyment or as a reality for practice. To them it is a mere mysticism, the idea of being dead and risen with Christ, which they are too humble and reverent to look on and think about. Let me add that it is not the same thing as having life in Christ, for this was of course ever true of believers before there was or could be such a standing as that of being dead and risen with Christ. After the death and resurrection of Christ, such was the great change in this respect that then came in.

It is thus evident that to be dead with Christ takes a person not only out of the world in spirit, but out of the whole system of its religion. "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" Such had been the condition of men, at best, before Christ. They were at the letters, so to speak; the rudiments or elements had their place and trial. But now, the Son of God being come and having given us to know Him that is true, it is the substance and fullness of the truth that we know in knowing Christ. The work of Christ rested on by faith fits the believer now for this place where old things are passed away and all things are made new. "Why, as though living in the world" is a most remarkable expression. It shows that we are not true to our standing, as well as to Christ, if we are as men alive in the world. We have a new life, which is the life of Him who is dead and risen; and this has now brought us into the condition of death to all that is of the world. Hence as to the religion of the world, the Christian has in principle as really done with it as Christ Himself had after

His death. What had our Lord from His cross to do with the fasts and feasts of the Jews? Absolutely nothing; neither ought we; and by "we" I mean every real Christian. The time of patience with the Christian Jews is long passed away; there is no longer the smallest ground of excuse in Christendom.

I admit that the great mass of Christians will not hear of such a breach with the world; and thus comes one severe trial of those who see it thus a foundation truth of Christ. Have they in grace made up their minds for His sake to be counted fanatical, foolish, proud, hard, narrow, committing these and all other calumnies to Him who loves them, and knows the end from the beginning? The taking up the rudiments of the world is then a flat practical contradiction to our death with Christ.

The Colossians were in danger of this snare. They did not see why, because they were Christians, they should leave off what seemed good enough done among the Jews or Gentiles. They wanted to hold on to the truth of Christ, but to keep up, or adopt along with it, religious forms which had been observed in olden times. No, says the Apostle, it is Christ who is all our good, and nothing but Christ; we need nothing else. Christ is all. Nothing was so exclusive as Christ and the cross, and yet what was so large? "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." But He was rejected. Since then Jewish forms and principles had lost all their ancient value.

In Galatians the Apostle speaks even more strongly than here. He charged those who would observe days and months and times and years with going back to heathenism. "Howbeit then when ye knew not God, yet did service to them which by nature are no gods" (that was their old Gentile condition); "but now after that ye have known God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" They thought that it was to improve on the early simplicity of the gospel, if they borrowed from the law. How little did they expect the apostolic rebuke, that it is as bad for Christians to take up Jewish elements as to turn back to idolatry! It is in truth now shown to be the same principle; such is the light in which the cross of Christ puts these worldly elements. Before many years are over, there may be

seen a strange amalgam not merely between the churches, so-called, but between Christendom and Judaism. The loss of the temporalities of the Roman See is no unimportant step in the chain of events. In due time Rome will be left free for the beast to display his power in, Jerusalem becoming the central seat of religion to which Christendom will turn. There will not only be idolatry, but the abomination of desolation; the man of sin will be set up and worshiped in his time. All works on toward a worse evil than even popery itself.

But if such will be the end, the way now is "living in the world," which means that the heart is here, that one has settled down to the world's religion. A Christian, on the contrary, is one who belongs to heaven. The error of embracing these Jewish elements practically denied this, and especially the being dead with Christ. The only sure way to judge of anything is to bring in Christ. The question here is, How stands Christ in view of the world's religion? When He lived here below, He, undoubtedly, went to the temple, owning and practicing the law (however truly the only begotten Son of the Father), for God did; He had not yet given up Israel, man, the earth, all things here below. But where and how is Christ now? One cannot, again, have and keep truth unless it be followed out; and God does not mean that we should possess it otherwise. He gives a testimony; the light shines; but the truth only fills a soul when acted on, else the light that is within becomes darkness; and then how great is that darkness! Need one hesitate to affirm that if a man professed to understand what it is to be dead with Christ and yet went on with the world's religion, he would show himself to be a thoroughly dishonest man? It is more than a want of intelligence. What more solemn, save sacrificing Christ's Person? Those who seem to have the truth but refuse to act upon it, will ere long become enemies of the truth which they do not follow.

The religion of the world has to do with this creation; it belongs to those things of which people can say, "Touch not, taste not, handle not." Take the principle of consecrated buildings, holy places within the holy, sacred vestments, anything of that kind which perishes with the using, all is con-

nected with the world; and the flesh is capable of enjoying it. To say it does not matter where or how we worship God is as bad as any evil. There is nothing worse than indifference in the things of God. Those who are thus careless in what regards God, are not wanting in vigilance as to what concerns themselves. I speak, of course, of the general facts, not of individuals. If we did not know ourselves associated with Christ dead and risen, our worship ought to be a kind of accommodated Judaism, which was the religion of a people living in the world.

Now, on the contrary, all that is entirely judged in the cross to be enmity against God; and Christians are called to have nothing to do with it. There is wonderful blessedness in realizing where the death of Christ puts us. It has quite closed with whatever is alive in the world, with all that a man in the world might value. Living in the world takes two great forms, one superstitious, the other secular, self being necessarily the root of both. Being dead with Christ delivers us from both. Take the American churches as the secular form in religion; the one idea is to make themselves comfortable even in devotion. The idea of worshiping God is gone. They have no notion what it is to be dead with Christ. The greater danger, however, lies on the other or superstitious side, because that has a fine show of humility, piety, and reverence. But those who are truly, wonderfully, delivered through death and resurrection with Christ ought to avoid all reproach of lightness and negligence. Unbecoming behavior is nowhere so painful as where the Christian standing is known, and the ground of God's Church is taken.

Then the Apostle gives us a sample of what these ordinances are. It is not the power of the Spirit of God unfolding the things of Christ, but something that relates to self, chiefly of a negative character. Such of old was the dealing of law with flesh in an evil world. Faith is now entitled to look on Christ in heaven. "Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh." This is not God's will, but man devising means of pleasing Him out of his own head. All this clothes itself with a great apparent lowli-

ness, and cherishes asceticism. It is exactly what philosophy has done—denying the proper place of our bodies. How strikingly, on the contrary, does the New Testament bring out the vast importance of the body! It proclaims, for instance, that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. This is most important, and, itself the effect of redemption, is the true ground of Christian morals. "Yield up your members as instruments of righteousness to God"; "Present your bodies a living sacrifice," etc.

The philosophic mind of Corinth went on the principle that it mattered not about the body, provided the spirit was all right. The Apostle insists that the *body* is the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Further, there is the truth of the resurrection of the body, and not merely the immortality of the soul. The emphasis is upon the body; so that although the body is fallen under sin, the power of the Holy Ghost is there, who is said to dwell in each believer. You cannot reclaim the flesh, you cannot improve the will. The old man has to be judged, denied, treated as vile; but the body is even now made the temple of the Holy Ghost. Adam, before he fell, had body, soul, and spirit; but directly he fell, he acquired self-will—the loving to have his own way. This is a thing we should always treat as evil, and judge ourselves if in any way we allow it to act. What can give a man such power against it as Christ known thus in full delivering grace? Like the captured sword of Goliath, "of weapons there is none like that." If I am dead and risen with Christ, where is the old man? It does not exist in the sight of God; therefore we are not to allow it in the sight of men.

The prime thought of worldly religion is correcting the flesh, and improving the world. The mind finds greater glory in itself by ascetic efforts. Neglect of the body may be at the same time a puffing up of the flesh. It was a heathenish idea, the foster child of philosophy. They willingly believed that the soul was holy if not the body, some contending that the soul came from God and the body from the devil. This was productive of frightful evil, to the destruction of all morality. Is there not an answer in Christ to all these wanderings of the human mind? Receiving the truth in Him, you get that which

defeats the object of Satan; but the Holy Ghost alone, if I may so say, makes it to be truth in us. May it be received in the love of it, that thus there may be abundant fruit of righteousness by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.



### CHAPTER III

We have seen death with Christ and its consequences applied to the danger which menaced the Colossian saints, judging the evil into which Satan was trying to draw them back. But the effect of this death with Christ was there regarded chiefly in a negative point of view. Why were such as they subject to ordinances? They ought not to be, for in Christ they were *dead* from the rudiments of the world and had consequently nothing to do with ordinances. These might be all well enough for men alive in the world, but necessarily cannot apply to dead men. It was a total spiritual contradiction. Now the Christian is dead by virtue of the cross of Christ. This is all a matter of faith. Of course, he is alive naturally; he is disposed also, if not occupied with Christ, his life, to have old thoughts and habits revived, etc. As a believer I ought to distrust every judgment, every feeling I have had as a natural man, remembering that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.

But now the Christian is looked at as a dead man, aye, dead to the world doing its best, even the religious world. The best the realm of nature can pretend to is in not touching, tasting, handling. Such is its only way of getting the victory, which is really no victory at all, but merely abstinence from certain things, or a system of fleshly restrictions. That is wholly distinct from the principle of the Christian. He looks for the victory of grace. For the death of Christ has delivered him from the entire ground of nature in not touching, tasting, or handling. This was Jewish in principle, and not this alone, for it was the natural religion for man. It is only thus that men try to avoid evil in the world. Christianity does not merely avoid the evil within and around, but brings in death to it all. Christ has died to it, and the Christian should know himself dead to all that is of the world, moral or religious, as decidedly as gross, intellectual or infidel.

In chapter 3 we advance a step farther. The Apostle rea-

sons from our being risen with Christ. It is not merely that we shall die and rise, but that we *are* dead and risen. Even many Christians who use the words constantly, do not really enter into the meaning of this language, and for the obvious and sufficient reason: they are not living in the truth of it practically. They are too habitually mixed up with the world to understand such absolute separation from it. It is not that they are dull of understanding in the things and interests of nature. But their speech and their ways bewray them, proving how far they are from intelligence of the Scripture itself. They substitute mysticism for the truth.

Before Christ came, God had appointed a system of ordinances. Judaism was the world's religion in its best shape. Those who were formed in that school, till they underwent a total revolution by grace, never understood the distinctive features of Christianity. Its character was hidden from them. The Jews had no notion of the flesh being utterly ruined—sense of sin, understanding of the grace of God, small indeed. As a nation they were put under law, under Levitical priesthood, under outward sacrifices, under carnal ordinances. All this was a part of what they had to go through, great truths being concealed under these rudimentary pictures. Christendom has taken up the things that were right enough for a Jew, but which are now called "the elements of the world," as in truth they are. They were not so judged when God was dealing with Israel. It was, however, what the world is capable of. Now they are treated as elements of the world, but it was not so before Christ died.

There are many, for instance, who think you cannot have fit worship for God without a sacred building and ceremonies in accordance; and the more beautiful the building, and imposing the ritual, the more they count it acceptable to God. Now all this is part of the elements of the world. Again, there are those who think you cannot have the Lord's supper without an official ordained for the purpose of administering it. There is no such custom in the Church of God. The Apostle repudiates the entire system. It is an invention of the enemy. New Testament Scripture, which reveals the Church, excludes all this. Not only is it not a good thing, but all such thoughts and ways are evil

now, being opposed to the cross and the heavenly glory of Christ.

Scripture remains unchangeable (whatever the changes of Christendom), and what we need is to betake ourselves to the light of Scripture. This is a simple but immense safeguard—let us go back to God's Word and cleave to that alone. The devil was at this judaising work among the Colossians; his great aim was to lead them away to ordinances, Jewish forms which had their lawful place once, but were not in force now. Christianity treats them as of no account; and, indeed, so far from retaining any value, they are treated as childish, and even idolatrous for the Christian. That was naturally a very serious difficulty for a Jew. All that Moses, David, Hezekiah honored as religious observances, were they asked to abandon now? Yes, but Christ had come; and were they not to "hear *Him*" now? Redemption, the substance of their figures, was wrought; was this to be slighted?

The great error of Christendom has always been a going back to ordinances. Take the principle of a consecrated order of men; what is it but the same thing? It is true, all Christians have not the same gift or place; there are only a few gifted to help, lead on, and instruct the many. What seems a difficulty to some is, that up to the cross of Christ was of course bound up with the Jewish system. But this closed with His cross, resurrection, and ascension. The Christian's connection with Christ is since then founded on the cross, which rent the veil and thus dissolved the Jewish system. Therefore it is said, "Seek the things above where Christ is seated on the right hand of God." v. 1. It is very beautiful, the allusion to Christ's place on high outside the world. Thus His settled peace in glory is our keynote. Not that we are here said to be seated in Him there. In Ephesians that side of the truth is pursued and enforced. But the epistle to the Colossians never carries the believer so high! it shows Christ there, but it does not, so to speak, set us there. The resurrection of Christ, or, rather, our being risen with Him, is urged as the ground for our seeking the things above.

"Let your mind be on the things above, not on the things on the earth." v. 2. Who can loyally have divided affections?

As our Lord Himself said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The Lord put it as a moral impossibility. But here it is urged as an exhortation founded on the immense grace that has raised us up with Christ risen. In vain do you essay to be occupied at the same time with things heavenly and earthly. Our calling is to have our mind on the things above, not merely now and again, but at all times. Suppose a person to be engaged in business; is he not to attend to it? Surely; yet not to set his mind on it, but simply to go through all as a duty to the Lord. Ought he not to do it better than another man who has not Christ? I am assured that such would be the fruit of looking to the Lord, while the same single-eyedness and faith would preserve him from the snares of covetousness, as well as vain glory. The Christian thus taught and walking has an object before his soul which alone is adequate to raise a man above self and the world. Of course, if he is thus laboring day by day to the Lord, the consciousness of the grace in which he stands would deliver him from the carelessness, or self-indulgence, or speculation, which expose men to get into debt or to act in other dishonorable ways. For this is to sink beneath even decent worldliness. Yet, if a Christian does not walk with exercised conscience before the Lord, he is in danger of doing worse and going farther astray than an ordinary man. Humbling and grievous as this may be, it is not surprising. The main object of Satan is put forth to dishonor Christ in those who bear His name, and the power of the Spirit is only with those whose heart is toward Christ. It is not, then, Have your mind partly on things above and partly on things on the earth, but have it *not* at all on the things that are on the earth.

Whatever the Lord gives you to do, you can take up as service to the Lord; but even here there is need to watch narrowly and, not the least, spiritual work in the gospel or in the Church. There is no security in anything but in Him who sits at the right hand of God. Take, for instance, research into the Scriptures. One might be absorbed in the niceties of the language, the prophecies, the poetry, the history, the doctrine, etc. Any or all these might become a snare. Where is safety for us but in Christ Himself—Christ as He is above?

Moreover, there is added a remarkable statement of the

reason why we should have our mind upon things above—"for ye have died." It is not moralizing, like men, even heathen, that we have to die, but the fundamental Christian truth that we *are* dead. All mystics, old or new, have, as their object, to die. Hence it is a dwelling upon inward experience and human effort—the endeavor to crucify themselves—not "*I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.*" "*They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.*" What was suitable for a Jew, so far from being necessarily for a Christian, is on this side of the cross; our foundation is Christ who is dead and risen. The fact that a thing is in the Bible does not warrant the conclusion that it is God's will for the Christian. We must seek rightly to divide the word of truth. What was formerly right for the Jews is for us nothing but the elements of the world. These forms pointed to a reality that is now come; the body is of Christ. The blessed portion of a Christian is, that he is dead even to the best things in the world, and alive to the highest things in the presence of God; for Christ is his life.

To have our mind, therefore, on the things which accord with Christ in glory is what we are called to — first of all, Christ Himself, then the mighty work of Christ in redemption viewed in its heavenly effects. What objects to have before us always! The hopes too that we are connected with Christ thus known, spiritual wisdom brought into exercise thereby, the affections kindled and in play; in short, all the fruits of Christ's work in relation to heaven are comprised in these things above. "*For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.*" v. 3.

The prevalent notion with many is, that the Christian is just the better qualified to fill a place in the world, because he is a Christian. But this is in truth to deny the primary and precious truth of God, that I am *dead*, which my very baptism confesses. And it is remarkable that the impression of the world about any one who receives Christ is, that he is as good as gone. They feel that he is lost to his former objects; and if he takes his place in any full measure as belonging to Christ,

he does justify the instincts of men; for he ceases to act as one alive in the world. Alas! Christendom soon accustoms him to be false to Christ. But the truth is that "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." As yet it is hidden; Christ has not yet caused His glory to be seen by the world. Therefore should a Christian be content to be for a little while an object of rejection and scorn. Faith and patience are thus put to the proof; God allows it to be so; and a Christian ought not to wonder at it, for Christ had just the same portion. A single eye is not deceived; selfishness is blind to God's glory. We would be true to the moral power of the cross—the night is far spent. The reason why we are despised is thus a blessed source of joy in our sorrow. Then the time is short. All will soon be changed.

There is the further truth, "when the Christ, [who is] our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." v. 4. Christ is not always as now to be hidden; He is about to be manifested; and when He is, we too shall be manifested with Him in glory. God will bring us along with Him, as we learn elsewhere. We shall have been translated to Him, in order that, when He shall be seen by every eye, we may have the same portion with Him. The expression "hid with Christ in God" is a much more emphatic one than simply saying, He is absent in heaven. In John 13 it is said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself and shall straightway glorify him." It is not merely glorification in heaven, but what Christ has now in Himself. It is while He is hidden in God, as was said in verse 3, and in contrast with the display of His glory when He comes by-and-by, as in verse 4.

The Colossians had lost sight of this truth in great measure and were in danger of getting on a track that would have deprived them of all enjoyment of peace and confidence in God. The theory was to add what they could to Christ in order to increase the saints' blessing and security, and make a present display to His glory. The Apostle shows them that their life is *hid* with Christ *in God*. Consequently, though they possess the most perfect security, it is in accord with Christ's place, hidden and not displayed yet. "When Christ, who is our life,

shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness," etc. v. 5. Because ye are dead, because ye have this new life, even Christ, and so are dead and risen with Him, mortify your members which are upon the earth. What were they? Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Such is what they—what we—really are. It is a wonderfully strong and pointed way of presenting the truth. God is not mocked. Grace does not hinder His judgment either morally in His Word or by-and-by when it shall be executed. "On account of which the wrath of God cometh on the sons of disobedience: in which things ye also once walked, when ye lived in them." vv. 6, 7.

"But now do ye also put off these all, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, base language," etc. It is sweet to see how the truth of being dead with Christ is brought in as deliverance from nature in all its forms, no matter whether corruption or violence. It is the judgment of the first Adam as a whole; nothing is spared. The "ye" is emphatic in verse 7. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of him that created him." God would have His children enjoy the fullest comfort; and indeed it is impossible for a person to be practically holy until he is happy. There may be godly desires and the Spirit be at work, but there is not power till the soul finds its peace and deliverance in another that God gives in pure grace. Then, when he is made happy through Christ and His work of redemption, he goes to God as his Father and has the Holy Ghost as power, and all the other practical results which flow from that new relationship. "Where there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all and in all." v. 11.

How beautifully in keeping is the Christian motive seen in this, that we should not lie, etc., not only because it dishonors God, but because we have put off the old man and have put on the new man! All appears in a strikingly characteristic light. God in His very instructions to us fails not to remind

us here of our blessing. If we are therefore called to put off anger, wrath, etc., it is *because* we are dead. If we are told to walk no longer in uncleanness, it is on the ground that, though we once lived in it all, we are now *dead* to it and alive in Christ. If we are exhorted to speak the truth, it is because we *have* put off the old man and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. In Him is no darkness at all. He is the true light that now shines.

It is imperative on us as Christians to value nothing but Christ. I speak simply of our place as Christians; but what does not this embrace? As Christ is all and in all, so we have to seek to act upon this always, only prizing in one another what is of Him. If I love and prize Christ, such will be my feeling toward Christians, even as I shall want myself and all Christians to feel that Christ is the only thing worth our thoughts, affections, labor, and life. There is continual danger of the Christian's sinking into thoughts of natural qualities, of those things that make men attractive. The point of faith is to rise above all this. "Let your *light* so shine," etc. Where Christ is not steadily adhered to as an object and motive, nature will break out as bad as ever. But before God and to faith I am entitled to treat it as dead; and I owe it to Him who died for me and rose again to act upon the great truth that God has passed sentence upon the old man. To this end I must judge myself with my eye fixed upon Christ. Otherwise there is no failure in which I may not dishonor Him. No man ever walks inconsistently while his eye is on Christ. Nor is it merely sense of his own weakness, but the consciousness that the old man is judged and gone from before God. What a blessed standing is the Christian's! The Old Testament saints were kept from sin by expecting and desiring Christ; but we look on Christ now, being dead and risen with Him who has already done all for us. Is it not an incalculable progress? And there is difference quite as marked as the progress, but on this I dwell not now.

In Ephesians the ground for not lying is because we are members one of another. Here it is treated as inconsistent with our having put off the old man and put on the new man.



Thus it is an evident contradiction of the new nature, as well as of the judgment and setting aside of the old one. The judgment doubtless took effect upon Christ; but then faith in Him supposes it has been applied to us, and that we have, through Him, renounced self, yea, put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new. The old man is supposed to account for lying; the old man is false, full of deceit. There is not, there cannot be, thorough truthfulness in nature as it is now. We see this from the first; Adam was false directly he sinned. Cain was false also. There may be other evils, such as violence, shown betimes in some and not in others; but all are false—lying one does see in all. The ordinary forms of social intercourse are founded more or less upon deceit in the present state of the world. Men say what is agreeable to others without thought. Men subscribe forms, especially in religion, which they are not expected to believe, and, sad to say, the best men least of all. This all shows how universally falsehood follows the old man—here it is a question of Christians, and therefore we have the new man.

In Ephesians we hear of the members of the body; here it is the nature. In Ephesians also they are to put off the old man and put on the new; but here it is said, "which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." In Ephesians it is as a fresh thing that they had not before, without any reference to being renewed; it is absolutely new-created; whereas here they have received the fresh blessing, but at the same time there is renewing. Both ideas are in the two epistles, but put so as to prove the complement of each other. In Ephesians it is said that the new man is after God created in righteousness and true holiness. What is the difference between the two? Righteousness brings in the idea of authority; it supposes an answer to a just claim; let it be man that meets it, or God, a right to demand underlies it. Holiness is His nature alone and intolerant of evil; it has in itself nothing to do with the claim of justice. To the believer Christ is made righteousness, which is grounded on God's judgment, though it may be entirely settled in our favor; whereas holiness would have been true apart from the question of His authority; it is the essential nature and character.

The angels are said to be holy, but are never said to be righteous or just. The new man rejoices in both. There is entire acquiescence in the authority of God, and delight that the judgment of God has been so met in Christ that He is glorified more than ever. Besides that, there is the moral nature that feels with God. Righteousness is more a bowing to God, holiness is the participation of His own feelings about good and evil. In us the two feelings often mingle. Righteousness is a true balance, the maintenance of what is just in relationships of all kinds. For instance, it is *right* for a child to obey its parents; it is not merely holy but "right" to do so. The one belongs to the nature quite apart from relationship, or anything of duty, apart from anything that is a sort of obligation which brings in the idea of righteousness.

Hence, we see, Rationalists admit the value of holiness, but they seldom talk of righteousness; for righteousness supposes judgment. Righteousness is a terrible word for a man until he has got hold of Christ. Righteousness, I repeat, proclaims the authority of God. God was holy before sin came into the world; but who could speak of His righteousness before there was the judgment of evil, spite of conscience, and against His express authority? Under the law, therefore, which was the formal assertion of that authority in dealing with men in the flesh, Jehovah, as a righteous God, is continually set forth. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness," etc. There was neither righteousness nor holiness in Adam before he fell. We have both and become both in Christ. Adam was made upright, but that is not the same thing as being righteous or holy; it was the absence of evil; he was innocent, unfallen.

Righteous and holy is the description that God gives of the Christian. Adam knew nothing of evil as yet, neither was there any question of God's righteous claim upon him, save so far as the forbidden fruit tested his obedience; yet there was no limit of doing this and living, but rather of *not* doing lest he die. Adam was in a place of privilege, and the point was simply to enjoy it in obedience to God, on penalty of death if he disobeyed. We are in a wholly different position, being in the midst of evil, and acted on by a good outside and above us. Hence we are said to be called by glory and virtue; "by glory"

as the object, the condition in which Christ is, and "by virtue" as a restraint upon us and practical conformity to Christ (2 Pet. 1).

It has been well remarked that in Ephesians Christ is never spoken of as the image of God; He is so, very expressly, in Colossians. If we may discriminate, what we have in Ephesians is more Christ showing me what God is—not His image, but His moral likeness reflected in Christ. Hence it is said, "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." It is more the notion of resemblance than representation. Still, although you can say of Christ, He is the image of God, He is never said to be in the likeness of God, just because He *is* God. In Colossians we hear repeatedly of the image of God. Here, for instance, the new man is said to be "after the image of him that created him"; as in the first chapter Christ is said to be the image of the invisible God. The two ideas of likeness and image may often be confounded in our minds, but not so in Scripture, where likeness simply means that one person resembles another; image means that a person is represented, whether it be like him or not—both of course may be together.

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering." v. 12. These are the positive, moral qualities of Christ—the tone, spirit, and inward feelings of our Lord. It is not exactly as children, but "as the elect of God, holy and beloved," that we are called on to manifest the same. We are to feel and walk as the Lord walked here.

There is this character about Scripture, that, being divine, it never can be mastered by intellect alone, but always appeals to the affections and conscience as well as mind. It needs the power of the Holy Ghost to connect it with Christ in order even then to feel, judge, and act aright. "Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." v. 13. Christ is looked at as Head of everything in this epistle. He is viewed as the ideal of all that is good and lovely which God looks either for or from us. "And above all these things, love, which is the bond of perfectness." v. 14. There is more in love than

simple kindness and forgiveness; it goes beyond these. Love always brings in God, being the activity of His nature. His nature morally is light, but the energy of it is love that goes out in goodness to others.

Thus, love tends to bind together, whereas self or flesh is the very opposite, the one as decidedly removing difficulties, as the other brings them in. Love not only bears and forbears, but overcomes evil with good. "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." The peace of *God* is that perfect calm in which He rests as to all circumstances in this world and into which He brings the believer who looks up to Him, committing all circumstances into His hands without allowance of will or anxiety. Instead of our way of escape, which is what man's mind loves to take, because he has always a notion of governing for himself, faith enables a man to look up to God, and brings in the Word of God to bear upon what passes around us. But our epistle speaks of a peace more intimate. It is the peace that Christ has now, the peace He ever had when here below. Thus Christ Himself met all difficulties, as He saw all perfectly, resting in perfect peace about all; and so should we. No sense of evil without, no sense of weakness among His own, disturbs His perfect peace about everything.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful." v. 15. Thus it is peace, but not an isolated spirit, not as having done with one another, but, on the contrary, cleaving to all, spite of all. Supposing, for instance, something painful troubled me about one in communion, am I to be troubled by this so as to be hindered from going to the Lord's table? That would be adding wrong to wrong; for if it were right for me to stay away, it would be equally incumbent on others also. I am never warranted to yield to trouble about such matters, but entitled to have the peace of Christ ruling in my heart. There is always a way of Christ in everything, and this is very important for our souls to remember. "And be ye thankful"; not anxious nor fretful, but thankful. Everything that is wrong may be matter for judgment; but the best preliminary for judging soundly is to do what is according to God—perhaps to judge ourselves.

It is our privilege to think of Christ in all that we enter on.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God." v. 16. This is a remarkable contrast of the gospel with the law. The law decided this and that; and not this only, but the obedience of the law is definite; it does not leave room for a growing measure of spirituality. Now, in Christianity, there is an elasticity which leaves room for differences in spirituality. This does not suit the thoughts of human nature; it is too vague for it; but it is perfection in the mind and ways of God, who thus forms the affections and judgments. It is precisely what leaves room for the word of Christ. Here there is growth in every kind of wisdom, and also room left for the exercise of spiritual judgment. In the first chapter there is a similar principle, only there it is "being filled with the knowledge of his will, that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Here it is "That the word of Christ may dwell in you richly in all wisdom"; it is not a question of walk, but of enjoyment and worship. Hence, immediately after we have "teaching and admonishing one another," etc. By speaking of enjoyment and worship, its public exercise is not meant, but the spirit of it in intercourse with one another.

As to the difference between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, I suppose a psalm was a more stately composition than a spiritual song, which admits more of Christian experience and expression of our feelings. This may be very good in its way and season, but it is not the best or highest thing. A psalm, then, is more solemn; a hymn is a direct address to God and consists of praise. By psalms, of course, I do not refer to the Psalms of David, but to Christian compositions.

The exhortation, again, to sing with grace in their hearts was because the Colossian saints were far from the excellent state in which we may gather the Ephesians, for instance, were. "And whatever ye do in word or deed, do everything in [the] name of [the] Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." v. 17. This exactly meets what has been already remarked about bringing in everything as a matter for blessing the Lord, instead of finding only sorrow. Doing all

things in the name of the Lord Jesus includes not the mere thought of belonging to Him, but of perfect grace. Still it is the *Lord* Jesus, not Christ simply, but the "Lord Jesus," which involves our relation to His authority. Whatever grace may be shown us, the authority is not weakened, and the effect is that we give thanks to God and the Father by Him. A Christian man, woman, or child dishonors the Lord by yielding to the thankless spirit of the world. "Whatever ye do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." Thus our tone and speech, as well as ways, should testify our subjection to Him before whom all heaven bows.

Hitherto, the exhortations have been entirely general. Now the Apostle enters upon special relationships. The Spirit begins, as a rule, in these exhortations with the subordinate ones, with those under authority, rather than with those who are called to exercise it. The wisdom of this is manifest. If the one who should be subject behaves with humility, there is nothing more conciliating to such as are in authority. First of all, then, we begin with the most important of earthly relationships, that of wives and husbands. The wife, in accordance with that just principle, is exhorted before the husband. The emphatic word for the wife is to submit herself. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in [the] Lord." v. 18. Where she is not submissive, it is unseemly even in nature, but more especially in the Lord. The wife's subjection is fitting in the Lord, though no doubt "in the Lord" acts so far as a preservative, that if a husband required anything wrong, submission could not be right. The point here, however, I think, is rather the suitability of it as a Christian principle without entering into the question of how and when it should be made.

Some have inferred that as we are all one in Christ Jesus, there is now no submission due from the wife; that it was part of the curse and woman's special lot in and by the fall; but that now, when she becomes a Christian, the inferiority vanishes, and the woman stands absolutely equal with her husband. Now it is true that Scripture shows us a place and relationship in which the question of man and woman disappears. Thus, "if ye then be risen with Christ" applies in a manner

quite independent of age or sex; Christian man and woman and child are equally risen in Christ. But the moment you come down to special relationship, there are distinctions. If a person indulge in wrong thoughts about this, he is in danger of destroying weighty principles. The husband would abandon his right seat of authority; the wife as a matter of course would lose her only happy place of subjection; and where would the Christian child be if the scheme were followed out? As children of God, no doubt all stand on a level; father, mother, child, if believing, enjoy like spiritual privileges. The differences as to flesh and the world entirely disappear in Christ; but the moment you think of earthly relationships (and this is what we have here), there are differences, neither few nor unimportant, in what pertains to our present life and the shape of our walk as Christians. The difference between man, woman, and child, was not destroyed, and still less was it originated, by the fall; it existed before there was sin; the fall did not touch it in any respect. So far is Christianity from taking these differences away, that it strengthens them immensely.

When the Apostle forbids a woman to teach, etc., he does so on the ground that a woman is more likely to be deceived than a man. Adam was not deceived; he was no better for this, for though not deceived, he sinned boldly with his eyes open, while the woman was led away weakly. What the Apostle infers thence is that the woman should not teach nor rule, being stronger in her affections than in her judgment. A man may be worse, but is less likely to be deceived. The woman is governed by her affections instead of judgment guiding her. A woman is not so apt to fail on that side. A wise woman would show her wisdom in not putting herself in the place of, still less above, her husband. If she compared herself with him, she might be easily misled; but if she thinks of the Lord, she would rather put her husband forward. The principle of submission to the husband is here without any guard. "As it is fit in the Lord" does not mean so much acting as a measure, but that it is a seemly thing in the Lord for wives to submit themselves.

Next comes the word to the husbands. "Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them." v. 19. The wife needs not to be exhorted to love her husband; it is assumed

that therein her affections are all right. But it is very possible the husband might allow anxiety and outward pressure of life so to occupy him that he might not take sufficient care of his wife or interest in her anxieties; accordingly, this is the exhortation for him. The wife is necessarily thrown upon her husband; she leaves father, mother, and all, and is cast peculiarly upon her husband; and if he be not watchful, he may fail in thoughtful love, in the attention of every day, not sufficiently guarding his temper, which seems to be what is meant by being "bitter." There should be this affection for the wife, this vigilance against the influence of circumstances; the outward world might often occasion irritation, and then the husband is liable to vent his spleen at home, especially on his wife. This is human nature and what we know too often happens; but it is not Christ; and here it is guarded against. "Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them." Let none presume to think it needless.

In the same order parents and children appear, the fathers, however, more particularly. "Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing in [the] Lord." Here this also is put quite absolutely. We know elsewhere there are landmarks to guard us. It is evident neither a father nor a husband has any title to insist on what is contrary to the Lord; but accordance is assumed here. What the Apostle urges is that the children should in all things obey their parents. And how good is obedience! Scripture elsewhere brings in a limit, but not here. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" furnishes a very important restriction; at any rate it defines the sphere of obedience; it determines how and how far one ought to go. As a rule, even a bad father would like to have a good child. Many who drink or swear would be very sorry for their sons to do the same. "Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing to or in the Lord." This directs us simply to the Lord as the One to whom this obedience is acceptable, but well pleasing in the Lord goes a great deal farther. It is not the bare fact of regarding the Lord as the ultimate judge, who then will be pleased; but the Christian has the consciousness of the Lord's love now and of His interest in all his ways and trials day by day. No doubt He will



manifest His judgment of all that was done in the body by-and-by; but this should only strengthen the Christian now to do that which is well pleasing in the Lord. The best authorities are unanimous that it should be here "in the Lord" rather than "to the Lord." It is well pleasing that children should obey their parents, not naturally only, but (for the Christian, let it be) in the Lord. "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." v. 21. The mother is not thus exhorted, for as a rule *her* general fault is to spoil them. There is nothing that more discourages a child than a parent's continual needless fault-finding. Again, where a child is punished without deserving it, what can be more apt to create distrust, and so weaken the springs of love and respect?

We now come to the lowlier members of the household. "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." v. 22. It is absolute in every one of these cases in Colossians; not so in Ephesians, where there is more of a guard brought in. I should think this attributable to the happier and better tone of the Ephesians. They required rather the limits than the pressure of the duty. The Colossians, on the contrary, stood in need of exhortations to obey. Thus, for instance, if a man had to do with a well-ordered family, he would not have to urge obedience in the same manner as if they were disorderly. Strange to say, you will always find self-will the companion of a legal spirit. There is never true obedience without the power of grace. Who were the most stiff-necked people in all the world? The Jews, the same who boasted of the law. You will find, since the law has been taken as a rule of life for Christians, they too are less obedient and think nothing of going against the Scriptures. This was one danger for the Colossians — a spirit of ordinance and legality.

No person becomes obedient by good rules. What is it then that produces it? The heart must be filled with right motives; and what brings this about? Love for a person gives a sense of duty to him, and acts upon the heart. This makes obedience easy. Rules are never the power but only the tests of obedience in certain cases. This is even true of Christ's com-

mandments. *He* keeps them who loves Him, and he only. This induces obedience, and then what Christ says lies upon our hearts and minds and memories—not only His commandments but His word—whereas if we love not, how readily all is forgotten! This is an important difference in John 14. First the Lord speaks of His commandments, then of His word. The truth is, where there is a loving heart, any expression of will, even without a positive command, governs the affections.

“Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.” This is very important. Feelings, habits, etc., no doubt, have been brought in by Christianity—difficulties also (not that these ought to have been, but by reason of a fleshly mind)—all these arose. A bondman found himself suddenly a brother to his master; if he did not watch, he would soon begin to judge his master, whether he ought to say this or do that. If his master blamed him for anything, he might consider his master to have acted in a hard, fleshly way. How easy it is to slip into a wrong spirit, especially for a servant in presence of his master’s infirmities daily before him, and in danger of judging his master according to the evil thoughts of his own heart! But surely a man ought to do all better after, than before, he knew Christ. The notion that, because they have to do with Christians, the latter ought to put up with ill-done duties is all selfishness. The fact that servants are not bondmen now in no way alters the matter. In those days they had often to serve heathen masters. In any case the great thing is to remember the Lord Jesus and His will in every place. We belong absolutely to Him to do His bidding in all things. In order to walk well with God, let me take care that I am in a position according to His will where I have no qualms of conscience. A scrupulous conscience however is dangerous, though far preferable to a burdened or bad conscience; but it is dangerous, for the strain tends to break and to end in a bad conscience. There is no place in this world where one may not glorify God, sin of course excepted.

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.” vv. 23, 24. But not so occupied with the fact that you are serving

an earthly master; remember, "ye serve the Lord Christ." Thus will you be the more subject to your earthly master, doing heartily whatsoever ye do, not as being right only but with heart. The Apostle adds a remarkable word here, "he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons." v. 25. This takes in both the present and the future, as I suppose, being a general principle.

The condition of the Ephesians was such that the love of Christ to the Church could be developed and urged on them. The Colossians, not being in so healthful a state, are exhorted on a lower ground. Conscience needed to be exercised.

## CHAPTER IV

It is evident that the first verse of chapter 4 belongs to the special exhortations which occupy the close of chapter 3. Consequently, chapter 4 ought, if the division were accurate according to subjects, to begin at the second verse.

The exhortations to wives and husbands are correlative, also to children and fathers, and to servants and masters, making three pairs of such appeals. There is the difference to be noted that husbands and wives existed from the very first; not so the relation of master and servant. It is clear also, that though children were contemplated from the beginning, in point of fact they did not exist in Paradise. God took care there should be no race, no parent and child, before the fall.

It was when Christ had glorified God perfectly, that Christ became the head of a family. The contrast in this respect is very interesting and beautiful. What confusion, if some had been born in a state of innocence, and others in sin! God ordered things that there should be no family till man was fallen. To increase and multiply, however, was the intention and word of God even then. The relation of masters and slaves (as they are here supposed to be) was solely a result of the entrance of sin into the world. We do not hear of bondmen before the flood, though Noah predicts it of Canaan soon after. I presume that the mighty hunter, Nimrod, was the first that essayed his craft or violence in this direction.

If this be so, there is a remarkable gradation in these relationships; husbands and wives in Paradise, children born after the fall but before the flood, servants not heard of till after that. I do not mean at all that Scripture does not recognize this latter relationship—far from it—only it is well to see that it was one which followed not only the fall, but even the great judgment of God executed on the earth. Thus it is a condition of things very far from being according to God, that men should have their fellows as their property or slaves. And yet

even so, "masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal." v. 1. In our countries it is a relationship voluntarily entered into on both sides, and there are corresponding privileges and duties; but here, though it was a case of slaves, the call to masters is to be impartial in their ways with them. And this refers not only to equity as a matter between the master and a slave, but between the slaves generally. There might be much confusion and injury in a household by disturbing the equilibrium between the slaves. The wisdom of God thus provides for everything, even for what respects the despised bondmen. It is here said, "just"—not grace.

You can never demand or claim grace. In writing the epistle to Philemon, the Apostle brings motives of grace to bear upon the case; he does not dictate what Philemon was to do, but reminds him of his heavenly relationship, and leaves it to Philemon's grace. Though the runaway slave was justly liable to be put to death, Roman and indeed any other masters having the right to punish them thus, yet would he have Philemon now receive him again no more as a slave, but as a brother.

Here, however, it is a question of what was "just and equal." For the expression, "just," shows a sense of right; grace in this case would not have been suited, as it would have left the door open more or less. Justice maintains obligations. In Ephesians it is said, "forbearing threatening." It was wrong even to threaten a slave with violent measures. The Colossians, being in a lower condition, are plainly dealt with, and told to be just and equal; it is the recognition of certain responsibilities in which the masters stood to their slaves. Do not you, masters, imagine all duty is on one side; you have yours toward your slaves. This, often forgotten, seems implied in the word "just"; and "equal" forbids the indulgence of favoritism.

The rationalistic philosophy is mainly founded on the endeavor to blot out the word "duty." I have known persons even in the Church disposed to deny anything in this shape as obligatory on the Christian. But it is a fatal error. Grace no doubt alone gives the power, but moral obligations ever remain binding.

The broad-church class talk of holiness, they do not like

righteousness. That bias of mind ever tended to explain it away from Scripture. So Grotius used to say that the righteousness of God means His mercy—an idea as dreadful in its way as the common error that the righteousness of God means the law fulfilled. Such entirely deny the standing of the believer; for the law was not made for the righteous, but for the ungodly. Thus theologians are infected by a double error, either that of confounding the righteousness of God with the righteousness of the law, and making this to be both the standing and the rule of the Christian, or that of denying all righteousness in any shape by making it to be merely divine mercy. Both are quite wrong, and one error leads on to another; as truth hangs together, so does error. "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." "This is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."

"Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving." v. 2. The habit, the persevering habit of prayer, is of immense moment. And as Luke 18, so this chapter presses it strongly, though the Apostle does not look for such far extending and thorough spirit of supplication as in Ephesians 6. Their state did not admit either of like depths of desire or of such large affections for all saints in the bowels of Christ. Legalism, ordinance, philosophy, savor of the creature, not of God rightly known; they are not Christ and are far short of comprehending all that are His. Nevertheless, he does count, here as there, on a mind on the alert to turn occasions of difficulty or blessing, joy or sorrow, anything, everything, into matter for spreading before God; and this in a spirit not of murmuring anxiety, but of grateful acknowledgment of His goodness, and confidence in Him. How blessed that even the groaning of the Spirit in the believer supposes deliverance, and not mere selfish sense of evil! Not of course that the deliverance is complete or evil yet put down by power from on high and actually cleared out of the scene. But we know the victory won in Christ's death and resurrection, and having the earnest of the Spirit, feel the contrariety of present things to that glory of which He gives us the sense in Christ now exalted, the hope for all saints at His coming.

The consciousness of the favor already shown and secured

to us in Christ makes us thankful while we ask of God all good things suitable to it now, worthy of it in result by-and-by when evil disappears by His power. Yet it is remarkable to see how the Apostle values and asks for the prayers of saints—"praying at the same time also for us that God may open to us a door of the word to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which also I am bound." v. 3. The value of united prayer is great; but God makes much of individual waiting on Him and very especially as in the interests of His Church and the gospel—of Christ in short—here below. How little the Apostle was discouraged even at this late day! He writes to the Colossians, from his bondage because of his testimony to that very mystery of Christ which he still desired to be the object of their supplication on his behalf with God, "that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak" (v. 4).

Next, he reverts to their own need of walking wisely, considering those outside, and seizing the fit opportunity, though I doubt not the service of prayer such as we have seen, would have issued in their own blessing as truly as in good to others. "Walk in wisdom with those without, buying up the time. Let your speech be always in grace, seasoned with salt, to know how ye ought to answer each one." vv. 5, 6. Grace gives us the rich glow of divine favor to the undeserving, the display of what God is in Christ to those who belong to this guilty ruined world; salt presents the guard of holiness, the preservative energy of God's rights in the midst of corruption. It is not said, "always with salt," seasoned with grace, but "always with grace, seasoned with salt." Grace should ever be the groundwork and the spring of all we say. No matter how much we may differ, righteousness must be maintained inviolate.

It is this combination of divine love in the midst of an evil world, with uncompromising maintenance of what is due to God's holy and righteous will, that teaches the Christian not merely what but how to answer each one as he ought.

Next come personal messages (vv. 7-18). Observe the remarkable care of the Apostle to sustain and commend true-hearted laborers, knowing well the tone of detraction natural to men who can see the failings of those whose service left

themselves far behind. "Tychicus, my beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-bondman in the Lord, all my affairs shall make known to you, whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that he may know your matters and may comfort your hearts; with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is [one] of you: they shall make known to you all things here." vv. 7-9. This exuberance of affectionate commendation is greatly to be weighed. The lack of it tends to loosen and dislocate the bonds of charity among the saints. Remark further, that love counts on the interest of others in our affairs quite as much as it feels a real concern in hearing of theirs. Among men such a feeling is either unknown, or where it exists is but vanity; but then love, divine love, is not there. And love must exist and be known in order to understand its workings and effects. Truly it is called in this epistle the bond of perfectness.

"Aristarchus, my fellow-captive, saluteth you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received orders (if he come to you, receive him), and Jesus that is called Justus, who are of the circumcision: these [are the] only fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God which have been a comfort to me." vv. 10, 11. There is a singular change in comparing the notices here with those in Philemon. Aristarchus is here a sharer of the Apostle's captivity, as there Epaphras is; while there Aristarchus is a fellow-laborer of the Apostle with others, as Epaphras is here spoken of—at least as a bondman of Christ. They may have shared the Apostle's imprisonment successively, as some one has suggested. It is certain that Aristarchus was his companion not only in Asia, but during his voyage to Italy. This would tend to show, I think, that this epistle to the Colossians was written at least a little before that to Philemon, though both may be supposed to have been written at the same general date and to have been forwarded by the same hands from the Apostle, a prisoner at Rome.

How beautiful too is the grace which enjoined distinctly the reception of Mark! Remembrance of the past would else have forbidden a cordial welcome to himself, and so must have hindered his ministry among the saints. Thus, if here



we learn the secret of Barnabas's leaning (for he was his kinsman), when the breach occurred with the Apostle in earlier days, we learn that real love is as generous as faithful, acts at all cost for the Lord, and where requisite, spite of paining nature, but rejoices to praise aloud and heartily where the grace of God has intervened to the removal of the impediment. Of Jesus called Justus we know no more than that. Like Mark, he was of the circumcision; and, like him too, consoled the Apostle as a fellow-servant—a rare thing among those who had been used to the law and its prejudices. The Justus of Acts 18:7 was a Gentile proselyte. Barsabas, the candidate for the apostolate, who was a Jew of course, was so surnamed, but not called Jesus like the one in question.

"Epaphras saluteth you, who is [one] of you, a bondman of Christ Jesus, always striving for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all [the] will of God. For I bear him witness that he hath much toil for you, and those in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis." vv. 12, 13. It would be a joy for the saints at Colosse to know that Epaphras, himself a Colossian as well as Onesimus, did not stand higher in the love and value of the Apostle (chap. 1:7) than in earnest remembrance of themselves in his prayers for their blessing before God. Remark too that the doctrine of the epistle (that we are filled full according to all the fullness that is in Christ), far from excluding, is the basis of desire and intercession for the saints, that they may be practically perfect and fully assured in everything about which God has a will. There was no such narrowness as shut him up to a single assembly, though there was the affectionate recollection of need where saints and circumstances were specially known to him.

"Luke, the beloved physician, saluteth you, and Demas." v. 14. The occupation of Luke was not blotted out because he was a saint and a servant of Christ, and even an inspired writer. Demas, I should gather, was even now distrusted by the Apostle, who mentions his name with an ominous silence and without an endearing word — a thing unusual with the Apostle. Even to Philemon, about the same time, he is "my fellow-laborer." In 2 Timothy he had forsaken the Apostle, having loved the present age. The steps of declension were

rapid; no testimony tells of his recovery. But a more extensive falling off was at hand (2 Tim. 1:15); for, the ice once broken, many were ready to slip through. As for the Apostle, he had fought the fight, he had finished his course, he had kept the faith. The men who were little known for building up were active for leading astray; as one of this world's sages has said, The hand that could not build a hut can destroy a palace. Nevertheless God's firm foundation stands.

"Salute the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the assembly in his house. And when the epistle has been read among you, cause that it be read also in the assembly of Laodicea, and that ye also read that from Laodicea." vv. 15, 16. Whether this letter be that commonly known as the epistle to the Ephesians (and having a circular character), or that to Philemon (who may probably have resided in or near Laodicea), or whether it refers to a letter no longer extant (possibly a letter from Laodicea to Paul, literally), have been questions much contested among learned men. Two remarks may be made which seem clear and certain. 1) The epistle *from* Laodicea would be indeed a strange way of describing an epistle written *to* the church there. It would be natural enough, if it meant a letter which was then there and intended for the Colossian saints also, to whomsoever it may have been addressed. 2) There is nothing to forbid the view that more letters were written than we possess, God preserving only those which were designed for the permanent guidance of the saints. But that the one alluded to here is a lost letter, addressed to Laodicea, is wholly unproved. It is also obvious that the Colossian epistle was directed to be passed on to Laodicea. The letter the Laodiceans were to forward to Colosse *may* have been addressed to them, but the description necessitates no such conclusion.

What links of love and mutual profit among the assemblies!

"And say to Archippus, See to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it." v. 17. The brethren cannot forego their responsibility and exercise of godly discipline; but ministry is received from and in the Lord. The assembly *never* appoints to service in the word, but Christ, the Head, though apostles or their delegates (never the

Church) acted for Him when it was a question of local charge.

Finally comes "the token in every epistle"—at least in his regular province as Apostle of the uncircumcision: "The salutation by the hand of me, Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you." v. 18.